



Libya's Fractious South and Regional Instability

A multitude of armed groups and smuggling networks with transnational reach are driving southern Libya's integration into the Sahel–Sahara region. Contrary to widespread external perceptions, the extremist presence remains a marginal phenomenon in the southwest (Fezzan), at least in relation to the political struggles. Rivalries over the control of borders, smuggling routes, oilfields, and cities, as well as conflicts regarding the citizenship status of entire communities, are of far greater significance. These conflicts are centred on southern Libya, but have a regional dimension because of the transnational links of the parties involved.

This Note provides an overview of current actors and areas of contestation in southern Libya. It is based on interviews with political and military figures in Sabha, Ubari, and Murzuq during September 2013, and with representatives of southern Libyan communities in Tripoli, Benghazi, Niamey, and Agadez during 2012, 2013, and January 2014.¹



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Legacies of the Former Regime and the Civil War

The Qaddafi era's legacies weigh heavily on southern Libya, which had been the regime's main stronghold along with Sirte, Bani Walid, and Tarhuna. The communities in the region were among the main recruitment bases for the regime's security battalions and intelligence services. Key units were based on particular tribal constituencies:

- The Maghawir Brigade, based in Ubari, was made up exclusively of recruits from Tuareg tribes of Malian and Nigerien origin.
- The Tariq bin Ziyad Brigade, also based in Ubari, was dominated by Qadhadhfa and Awlad Suleiman.²
- The Faris Brigade, based in Sabha, was recruited from Qadhadhfa, Warfalla, Awlad Suleiman, and Tubu.
- The Sahban Brigade, based in Gharyan, was led by Maqarha (Al-Kdey, 2011).

The same groups filled the ranks of the regime's most powerful praetorian unit, the 32nd Reinforced Brigade, led by Qaddafi's son Khamis (ICG, 2012, pp. 10–14). The Tubu ethnic group was an exception in this regard. Notwithstanding their contingent in the Faris Brigade, the Tubu were marginalized in the security apparatus and the regular army, where they had few senior and mid-ranking officers. This was due to the fact that recruitment among the Tubu ended in the mid-1990s, after Libya abandoned its claims to the Aouzou strip.³

These recruitment patterns had important implications. First, the groups dominating the security apparatus controlled the lucrative illicit flows traversing southern Libya: migration and cigarette smuggling northwards, and the contraband of subsidized products from Libya southwards. The regime's core constituencies tightly controlled sensitive activities, such as drugs and weapons smuggling (Tabib, 2012, p. 266).

Second, recruitment into the security apparatus was often combined with a manipulative use of Libyan citizenship as an incentive for loyalty. Most of the Tuareg soldiers of Malian and Nigerien origin came to Libya in the 1970s and 1980s, or were born there. They and their families had repeatedly been promised Libyan citizenship—most recently at the beginning of the revolution—but for many, the necessary procedures were never completed. Members of Arab communities from Mali and Niger, including the Berabiche, Torshan, and Mahamid, were also recruited as soldiers. In contrast to the Tuareg, these men were not only naturalized, but also 'adopted' as members of the Qadhadhfa (Al-Mokhtar, 2011).⁴ At the same time, Qaddafi encouraged members of those parts of the Awlad Suleiman, Warfalla, and Qadhadhfa tribes who had fled Libya to take refuge in Niger and Chad during the Ottoman rule of the 19th century or the Italian colonial conquest in the 1920s to join his security apparatus. These men were granted second-class citizenship status as *aidoun* ('returnees') or so-called 'Arab nationals' (Pliez, 2006, pp. 697–699).⁵ During the Libyan occupation of the Aouzou strip, Tubu were recruited into the army, and thousands of people in Aouzou were registered as Libyan citizens. When Libya abandoned its claims, the need for political advantage was lost and, in 1998, the government decided to strip this category of Tubu of their citizenship (Al-Tibawi, 2009; Moheir, 2009; Cole, 2012, p. 15). Combined with further movements of recruits for armed groups after the revolution, these legacies produced a toxic mix of unresolved problems and claims to citizenship rights.

Third, given the heavy presence of security forces with close links to local communities, most of Fezzan remained firmly in the regime's hands until the fall of Tripoli in August 2011. As the regime's control disintegrated, the tribal and ethnic divisions on which the government had relied to control the region collapsed into open conflict. In the 'liberation' of Sabha, Awlad Suleiman who had fought with Qaddafi (only a handful of the tribe's members had joined forces with Tubu rebels in June) looted Qadhadhfa districts, breaking a longstanding tribal alliance.⁶ Throughout the region, new armed groups seized control of the smuggling business: along the southern borders, Tubu factions established themselves, while the Algerian border regions saw Zintani groups staking their claims. These new arrangements proved fluid: after initial cooperation between Awlad Suleiman and Tubu factions in the illicit economy, their agreement broke down over an arms deal. The breakdown in relations triggered major fighting in Sabha in March 2012, killing at least 147 people (UNSMIL, 2012, para. 11).⁷ The clashes in Sabha were a major turning point for alliances between tribally based armed factions: Tubu factions allied themselves with both Qadhadhfa and Tuareg groups to prevail against the Awlad Suleiman's attacks.⁸

Armed Groups and Their Transnational Links

Of the multitude of armed groups vying for control in southern Libya, many are transnational in their composition and activity. Despite this, the interests of the armed groups focus on control over specific towns or regions. Only the more powerful among them also seek influence at the national level.

Tuareg factions

The transnational links are most obvious among the ethnic Tuareg armed groups. Originally recruited to Qaddafi's 'Islamic Legion' from Mali and Niger in the late 1970s, Tuareg were sent to fight in Lebanon (1981–82) and Chad (1986–87) (Boilley, 1999, p. 446; Burr and Collins, 2008). While many subsequently joined the rebellions in Niger and Mali in the 1990s, a significant proportion later returned to Libya.

Recruitment continued among Sahelian Tuareg migrants in Libya. Tuareg recruits were spread across a number of military units until 2004, when the Maghawir Brigade was established in Ubari. The Brigade was under the command of General Ali Kanna, a Targui with close relations to Qaddafi. Its 3,000 men were predominantly of Malian origin. More Sahelian Tuareg soldiers made up part of the 32nd Brigade, or were recruited in the first weeks of the war. Together, these Tuareg contingents were key to the regime's war effort, aiding in the repression of protests in Tripoli and fighting on the Misratan and Zintani fronts.⁹

In the final months of the war, hundreds of Tuareg soldiers deserted and returned to their areas of origin, fearing reprisal by revolutionary forces or expulsion due to their ambiguous claims to Libyan citizenship. In late August 2011, several hundred soldiers led by Col. Mohamed ag Najem left for Mali (*Le Combat*, 2011b).¹⁰ That October, another convoy of around 400 Tuareg soldiers arrived in northern Mali (RFI, 2011; *Le Combat*, 2011a). Under Col. Najem's leadership, a portion of the former Libyan forces organized to form the military backbone of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which then launched the rebellion in northern Mali.

Most Tuareg soldiers of Sahelian origin stayed in southern Libya. Defectors from the Maghawir Brigade set up the first 'revolutionary' Tuareg armed group after Tripoli's fall: the Ténére Brigade. The Brigade's entry into Ubari in September 2011 was considered the town's 'liberation', and the group emerged as one of the two largest units in the town. The largest was the Maghawir Brigade—renamed the Tendé Brigade—which kept its structure and its status as an official unit of the Libyan Army. According to the Tendé Brigade's commander, the vast majority of Maghawir soldiers who escaped to Mali in 2011 have since returned to the unit. The commander cited several reasons for their return: their families had stayed in Libya, the political situation in Mali (where the MNLA was overtaken by extremist groups), and the dissipation of the threat of retaliation against Sahelian Tuareg.¹¹

The flight of Maghawir soldiers and their subsequent return after participating in the rebellion in northern Mali illustrates the mobility between armed groups in Ubari and the Sahel. Indeed, Col. Najem—who remains the MNLA's chief of staff—regularly travelled to Ubari during 2012 and 2013. Several smaller armed groups have emerged in Ubari among Tuareg of Sahelian origin. Among them is Border Guards Brigade 315, headed by Cheikh Ahmed Omar al-Ansari, a first cousin of the former leader of northern Malian Islamist group Ansar Dine (Iyad ag Ghali).¹²

Close ties also exist with northern Niger. In early 2013, the Nigerien government allowed Gen. Ali Kanna to return to southern Libya, where he has since been under the protection of his former brigade.¹³ Gen. Kanna has close relations with former Nigerien rebel leader Aghali Alambo, who had recruited Tuareg fighters for Qaddafi's war effort (in 2011) and has regularly returned to Ubari since early 2013.¹⁴ Mohamed ag Boula, the brother of former Nigerien rebel leader Rhissa ag Boula, also retains close ties with Ubari from his base in northern Niger. Several hundred of his men had been integrated into Qaddafi's forces in 2005 (*Le Républicain*, 2005; Guichaoua, 2009, pp. 12–13). Many of those men joined the 2007 rebellion in Niger, subsequently fought for Qaddafi, and are now dispersed between southern Libya and northern Niger.

While smaller brigades led by Libyan Tuareg hold the town of Ghat, Tuareg groups of transnational origin form the main military forces between Ubari and the Salvador pass in Niger. In the first year after the regime's collapse, these groups had been weakened by their political marginalization, the temporary departure of some of their members, and the presence in the area of brigades from Zintan. Over the course of 2013, however, Tuareg factions curtailed the Zintani presence and consolidated their hold over the southwestern border triangle.¹⁵

Tubu factions

Armed Tubu groups emerged from a very different background to become major military players in southern Libya. Following political purges in the late 1990s, Tubu were poorly represented in the army and security apparatus. However, the Qaddafi regime continued to cultivate ties with Tubu rebel groups in northern Chad and Niger, even after Libyan troops left the Aouzou strip in 1994. Although Qaddafi offered support to such groups he also ordered clampdowns or mediated agreements with the governments they were fighting. In February 2011, the regime reactivated its links with the Tubu, attempting to enlist two former leaders of the Armed Revolutionary Forces of the Sahara (FARS), the defunct Nigerien Tubu rebel faction. One of these men, Barka Sidimi, deserted shortly after having accepted vehicles and arms from Qaddafi. The other former leader, Barka Wardagou, refused Qaddafi's offers. He later became one of the most powerful Tubu military leaders in southern Libya and head of the Murzuq military council.¹⁶

During the revolution, the fighting subsumed ethnic divisions: Tubu fighters cooperated with Zwayya (in the town of Kufra) as well as with a small group of Awlad Suleiman revolutionaries. The Tubu fighters acquired their arms via Sudanese support for the rebels and by seizing Libyan Army bases. As Fezzan fell to the rebels, however, armed groups quickly coalesced along tribal and ethnic lines.

After Fezzan's fall, there were initially four main Tubu factions in the region:

- The Brigade of the Martyr Ahmed al-Sharif, led by Ali Ramadan Sida.
- A brigade in the Kufra area, led by Issa Abdelmajid.
- The Desert Shield brigade led by Barka Wardagou.
- The Martyrs of Umm al-Araneb Brigade, which operated in the Qatroun and Murzuq areas, and was led by Ramadan Laki.¹⁷

Both Sida and Laki were former Libyan army officers, while Wardagou had served in the Libyan army in Lebanon and Chad before leading the FARS. Abdelmajid had worked for Libya's internal security apparatus before turning against the Qaddafi regime to found the Tubu Front for the Salvation of Libya in 2007. Another Tubu leader, Al-Lashi al-Mahdi (head of the Qatroun Martyrs' Brigade), was an important player in the Tibesti region during the 1980s and early 1990s, repeatedly switching sides between Qaddafi and the Habré and Deby regimes in Chad, before being imprisoned by Qaddafi. In sum, Tubu military leaders' biographies and cross-border networks are closely linked to the complex policies of the former regime in northern Chad and Niger.

Since early 2012, Tubu factions have both expanded their influence in Fezzan and fragmented into smaller armed groups. At least four Tubu units are based in Sabha. They exert exclusive control over the roads from a checkpoint 17km south of the town towards the Chadian border. Following the March 2012 clashes between Tubu and Awlad Suleiman militias, the town was under a fragile truce. However, a March 2013 peace agreement failed to find broad support among the Tubu and, in January 2014, major clashes erupted between Tubu factions and army units dominated by Awlad Suleiman. In the first week of fighting alone, 31 people were killed (Mohamed 2014, *Libya Herald*, 2014).¹⁸ The Tubu have also encountered fierce opposition in the Kufra area. Several hundred people were killed in repeated bouts of heavy fighting in the town between November 2011 and April 2013. The fighting pitted Tubu armed groups against Zwayya-based groups, as well as units of the Libya Shield. South of Kufra, Tubu positions have continued to impede the activities of Zwayya factions in smuggling and migration. Attempts by Tubu factions to block the Kufra–Ajdabiya road in December 2013 provoked repeated clashes with Zwayya units, which in January 2014 escalated into fighting over oilfields in the Sarir region, south of Ajdabiya (Lojli, 2013; Lana, 2014; al-Arabi, 2014).

Tubu armed groups have gained formal status as units of the border or oilfield guards. They control much of the southern border and oilfields from Sarir (250km south of Jalu) to the 'Elephant Field', south of Ubari. Tubu armed groups developed vested interests in the oilfields as international oil companies across Libya have entered into direct arrangements with the units 'protecting' them. For many border guard units, controlling the borders means monopolizing the illicit cross-border flows.¹⁹ Northern Libyan military leaders eager to expand their influence have sought to build alliances with Tubu factions by supplying them with vehicles.²⁰

The complex history of Qaddafi's citizenship policies towards the Tubu is distorted both by the Tubu and their rivals. On the one hand, Zwayya and Awlad Suleiman rivals have stirred xenophobia by denouncing Tubu groups as 'Chadian mercenaries' and spreading misleading portrayals of 'demographic changes' after 'colonization by the tens of thousands'. On the other hand, it is undoubtedly true that the Tubu's newfound military power and lucrative control over oilfields and smuggling routes has attracted Tubu from Chad and Niger to join their ranks. According to Nigerien Tubu leaders, the Kowar region of northeast Niger has virtually emptied itself of young Tubu men since the end of the Libyan civil war.²¹

Close family relations among Tubu that cross international borders have facilitated these movements, as have the networks established by the former regime's policies in Chad and Niger. At the same time, Tubu military leaders in Fezzan actively cultivate ties south of the border. In August 2013 Barka Wardagou led a delegation of tribal leaders from Fezzan to Dirkou, in Niger, to meet with local officials to discuss cooperative efforts in border control.²² Shortly afterwards, Wardagou intervened to return a vehicle and several prisoners seized by a Tubu armed group in a skirmish with the Nigerien army.²³

The emergence of militarily and financially powerful armed Tubu factions in southern Libya has significantly strengthened Tubu cross-border ties. By all accounts, their position along the southern border has allowed their networks to substantially expand their share of the smuggling economy in northern Niger. The Nigerien and Chadian governments follow this evolution with growing concern, wary that transnational Tubu factions may seek to use their position of strength to challenge government control in the northern areas.

Tribal militias

Across Fezzan, communities have been heavily militarized since the collapse of the Qaddafi regime. Former members of government forces held on to parts of their weapons stockpiles, organizing themselves into militias along tribal lines. Across the south, major arms depots were looted. Dozens of armed groups emerged in Sabha. Among the most powerful are militias of the Awlad Suleiman tribe, in which the tribe's revolutionaries mingle with its former government soldiers. Sabha's most prominent group is led by Bahreddin al-Rifi al-Sharidi. Convicted for drug smuggling under the former regime, he now controls major stocks of weapons.²⁴

The Awlad Suleiman's biggest rivals in the Sabha area are the Tubu militias. Other armed groups based on tribal affiliation have also emerged in the Sabha area. These include militias affiliated with the Qadhafha, Warfalla, Hasawna, and Mahamid tribes. North of Sabha, armed groups have formed among the Maqarha in the Wadi al-Shati area. Some of these units have gained formal recognition as border guards or army units, but many remain underground. The militias control public buildings, businesses, banks, and specific neighbourhoods. Some militias engage in criminal activity.

Like the Tubu and Tuareg groups, many tribal militias have ties to the Sahel. The Qaddafi regime's recruitment of Hasawna and Awlad Suleiman men for the civil war had focused on the *aidoun*, and both groups saw further returns from Niger and Chad after the war.²⁵ The capacity of these groups to engage in cross-border activities, however, now depends on arrangements with Tuareg and Tubu groups controlling the border areas.

Since the departure of the *Saeqa* special forces in February 2013, almost all officially recognized units in the Sabha area are tribal militias.²⁶ This generalization also applies to the army's recently established Sixth Division, which is dominated by Awlad Suleiman. The Division is headed by Ahmid al-Ataybi, the Suleimani head of the Sabha military council. As such, the deployment of the Sixth Division on Sabha's streets in December 2013 should

not be equated with an effort to establish state control. The military governor appointed by the government does not command any neutral force.

A partial exception to the pattern of tribal militias is the Libya Shield's southern command, an Islamist-leaning unit recruited from various local communities. It was formerly headed by Djibril Baba, who was abducted and killed in early December 2013—allegedly by Tubu assailants, in circumstances that remain unclear.

Clashes between the militias are common. In September 2013, for example, Bahreddin al-Rifi's militia clashed with a Hasawna unit holding an army base at Sabha airport. The Awlad Suleiman militia forced its rival to relinquish control of the base.²⁷ Tensions escalated in January 2014 with a confrontation between Tubu and Awlad Suleiman factions. The military governor and Suleimani representatives in Sabha portrayed this as a conflict between 'foreign forces' and 'the national army' (Libyens.Net, 2014). Shortly after the initial clashes had subsided, militias dominated by Qadhadhfa and Maqarha launched major assaults on army bases in Sabha and the airforce base in nearby Tamanhant (Al-Ansari, 2014; Al-Manara, 2014). The ensuing days saw heavy fighting between the Qadhadhfa and Maqarha militias and units recruited from Awlad Suleiman, Hasawna, and Awlad Busaif. The attacking militias held the Tamanhant base for over a week, and were only dislodged with the arrival of forces from Zintan and Misrata, mobilized by Tripoli. The situation was ongoing as of the end of January 2014.

The January 2014 conflict was the most significant confrontation in southern Libya since the end of the civil war. These clashes demonstrated that the rifts of the civil war continue to structure conflicts among communities in southern Libya. Although the conflict was widely portrayed as a revanchist effort of the old regime and its allies, the motivations behind such claims differed. The Awlad Suleiman sought to delegitimize their adversaries by tying them to the former regime. Elements of the former regime sought to score a propaganda victory by portraying the conflict as a resurrection of the Qaddafi government. Despite these claims, it is unclear what role counter-revolutionary motivations played in the conflict. At its core, it appears that the conflict is related to the rifts that emerged between Awlad Suleiman and Qadhadhfa in the final weeks of the revolution. With the entry of the Maqarha and Qadhadhfa militias into the conflict against the Awlad Suleiman, the Tubu militias removed themselves from active fighting. The Tubu did not wish to be drawn into a conflict that was widely (but misleadingly) portrayed as pitting revolutionary against counter-revolutionary forces. While Tubu representatives welcomed Zintani and Misratan forces as a neutral third party, the Qadhadhfa and Maqarha expected these forces to side with the Awlad Suleiman.²⁸

The emerging extremist presence

The extent of the extremist presence in Fezzan is difficult to establish. Since the French-led intervention in northern Mali began in January 2013, the international media has been full of references to southern Libya as a safe haven for extremists escaping northern Mali. Reports, often drawing on briefings by French or US officials, have spoken of training camps or even a whole region 'under the control of al-Qaeda' (RFI, 2013). Nevertheless, this presence has almost certainly been exaggerated by media reports, few of which have been based on field research in the region.

The ability of extremist groups to transit through Fezzan, relying on local allies, is undisputed. Benghazi-based Ansar al-Sharia sent at least one convoy of fighters and weapons to northern Mali in late 2012. The convoy reportedly used official permits to pass checkpoints at Hun and Tamanhant.²⁹ The group responsible for the January 2013 attack on the gas facilities at In Amenas, Algeria, was reported to have assembled at al-Aweinat (north of Ghat) in Libya. The group's leader, Lamine Bencheneb, had married into a family from the town.³⁰

Local officials and military leaders confirm that extremists fleeing northern Mali have established themselves in the Ubari area. Tuareg brigade leaders assert that they cannot confront these groups without government support, due to inferior firepower and threats to their families made by the extremists (although such explanations are only partly credible).³¹ They insist that they have advised the government of the problem, to no effect. Leading Libyan Tuareg figures claim that the Tuareg brigades of Sahelian origin take no action against the extremist groups because of tribal and family ties; the aforementioned relation between Ahmed Omar al-Ansari (head of a Libyan border guards unit) and Iyad ag Ghali (former leader of Malian insurgent group, Ansar Dine) is a

case in point.³² The extremists are also said to have substantial capital at their disposal. Whatever the precise reasons, there are clearly arrangements between extremists coming from Mali and local armed groups.

There are reasons for caution regarding claims of a major extremist presence in Fezzan. Even local interlocutors who confirm such a presence strongly deny that such groups have set up training camps or are recruiting locally. As noted above, military mobilization in the region largely occurs along tribal and ethnic lines; the strongholds of Jihadi Salafism in Libya are not in Fezzan but in the coastal cities of Darna, Benghazi, Sirte, and Misrata. Moreover, local actors often seek to damage their adversaries by branding them as extremists, often based on scant evidence. Tubu leaders systematically emphasize the threat of extremism in discussions with Western interlocutors, using the 'al-Qaeda' label to stigmatize religiously devout militia leaders, and portraying their own community as a bulwark against jihadism.

Key Areas of Contestation

Territorial control

As in other areas of Libya, Fezzan has fragmented into multiple local spheres of influence. Some of these are firmly under control of a single armed group, while others—such as parts of Sabha—are contested by multiple groups. Since militias exerting territorial control are generally members of a single tribe or ethnic group, these contests fuel inter-communal tensions. In the Murzuq area, for example, such tensions exist among the militarily dominant Tubu and smaller Arab communities, along with the *Ahali* (the Arabized population of sub-Saharan origin). Rivalry over the control of smuggling routes has led to a spillover of armed activity into the border areas of northern Niger, where clashes related to smuggling convoys are increasingly common.³³ The routes from al-Qatrun into Niger and Chad are firmly in the hands of Tubu factions, while Ubari-based Tuareg groups hold the Salvador pass. Along both routes, illicit flows are thriving: drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and migrants move north, while vehicles, looted machinery, construction materials, and state-subsidized products move south.

The most valuable territories are borders, routes and checkpoints, oilfields, and army bases and weapons stockpiles. The profits derived from controlling such assets have motivated the armed groups to expand their sway or maximize profits. In June 2013, for example, Tubu-affiliated guards blocked production at the Elephant Field to demand more employment opportunities for local community members in protecting the oilfield. Guards from Zintan, who were in charge of securing the oilfield, sought to break the blockade, but were deterred by Tubu reinforcements (Germa News, 2013; Mohamed, 2013).³⁴ The dispute ended with Tubu guards substantially strengthening their position at the oilfield.

The interests that such armed groups have developed will pose a major obstacle to attempts at re-establishing state authority. Leaders of brigades in the border areas stress that border control will be achieved only by putting local community members in charge.³⁵ They further complain that they receive no salaries or other support from the government. It is far from certain, however, that such groups would change their behavior if they were formally placed in control.

Citizenship

The problematic legacies of the former regime's citizenship policies are now a major area of dispute in Fezzan. The stigmatization of entire communities has poisoned inter-communal relations. For example, while negotiating a peace agreement with Tubu in Sabha, Awlad Suleiman refused to pay blood money for Tubu casualties, asserting that they were not Libyan nationals.³⁶ The issue is of acute importance, notably because the transitional government of Prime Minister Zeidan has begun implementing a national ID number scheme designed to clean up the public-sector payroll. In the absence of a clear approach to the citizenship issue, this process risks stripping substantial numbers of people of their rights.

Tensions flared in August 2013, when the body managing the process announced that it had cancelled one million 'fake' IDs attributed to Chadian *aïdoun*, Tuareg, and Tubu (Libyens.net, 2013). Partly in reaction to this, Tubu and Tuareg militia leaders swiftly issued a joint declaration in which they threatened to pursue regional autonomy for Fezzan. In October 2013, armed protesters began blockading the Sharara Field, north of Elephant Field, to demand the regularization of the citizenship status of Tuareg families. After two months, the government obtained a temporary suspension of the blockade with promises to look into the protesters' demands. The impending elections to the constitutional committee add further urgency, as voters will need to produce their national ID number in order to register.

The transitional justice law, published in December 2013, could become an even more important source of tensions. Paragraph 29 of the law stipulates the revocation of Libyan citizenship for 'anyone who was granted citizenship for military purposes or political reasons' (GNC, 2013). The implementation of this law will pose a direct challenge to Tuareg soldiers in Ubari, as well as to Arab *aïdoun* in the army.

The citizenship issue also fuels tensions *within* communities, particularly among the Tuareg. With the collapse of the Qaddafi regime, Libyan Tuareg leaders lost their intermediary function between the central government and Tuareg of Sahelian origin. The tribal establishment of Libyan Tuareg communities is active in politics, such as in the General National Congress or the 'High Council of Libyan Tuareg'. The military power, however, lies with groups of Sahelian origin. Formerly under regime control, they have become a force unto themselves, although lack of full citizenship rights prevents them from formally engaging in politics. The Libyan Tuareg elite is divided between those who champion citizenship for groups of Sahelian origin, and those who fear the loss of their political influence should these groups gain full rights. These divisions have contributed to the Tuareg High Council's wavering over whether the Tuareg should participate in or boycott the elections to the constitutional committee.³⁷

Demands for regional autonomy

Demands for Fezzan's autonomy in a federal system became louder during 2013. Such demands are partly driven by rivalries over territorial control: formalizing their *de facto* authority over regional spheres of influence is the logical next step for competing armed factions. But divisions within and among communities impede such ambitions. For each group, federalism would mean its own domination in the area, something its adversaries could not tolerate. Even in the territory where they dominate militarily, Tuareg and Tubu groups are either a minority or the largest among several other groups. As with other communities, both have been split with regard to the autonomy issue.

Federalist agitation is often associated with elements of the former regime seeking to detach the south from the new political order. In February 2013, such groups demanded that Ali Kanna be appointed military governor of Fezzan. In September, representatives of the Qadhadhfa, Magarha, Tuareg, and Ahali who were associated with the former regime declared Fezzan a federal region (Libya al-Mostaqbal, 2013). The declaration was made without any consultation with these communities, and was generally rejected across the south.³⁸ Among the Tuareg, politicians who had been influential under the Qaddafi regime have sought to mobilize Tuareg of Sahelian origin for the federalist cause with promises that they would push for citizenship rights. In sum, though federalist mobilization has been largely inconsequential to date, it has underlined the fractures among and between different communities.

Conclusion

Fezzan is currently the location of intensifying struggles over territory and resources that, for the time being, remain limited in geographical scope. Direct spillover into neighboring areas has been confined to the spectacular terrorist attack on In Amenas, as well as regular clashes over smuggling convoys in the Libya–Niger border area. But the transnational character of armed groups in southern Libya means that instability in Fezzan will have lasting effects across the region.

While the international perception of the problems in southern Libya focuses on the supposed extremist presence, the Libyan government appears preoccupied with developments in the country's northwest and east. It is illustrative of the government's limited power and presence in the south that it barely rates a mention in discussions about the region. As with Libya's other political interest groups, southern Libyan factions compete for influence in the government and the security sector, using personal and tribal ties to mobilize resources in pursuit of their individual agendas. However, most politicians wrangling over the transition in Tripoli are not interested in the developments in Fezzan. Southern Libya is set to remain a source of regional instability for the foreseeable future, and is also likely to become a growing concern for the emerging Libyan state.

Notes

- ¹ Given the sensitivity of security issues in southern Libya, the identities of many interlocutors remain confidential.
- ² Author interviews with a member of Tendé brigade, Ubari, and a former head of Awlad Suleiman brigade, Sabha, September 2013.
- ³ Author interview with Barka Wardagou, Murzuq, September 2013.
- ⁴ Author interviews with local officials and notables, Murzuq and Ubari, September 2013.
- ⁵ Author interview with a representative of the Awlad Suleiman, Niamey, November 2013.
- ⁶ Author interview with an Awlad Suleiman tribal leader, Sabha, September 2013.
- ⁷ Some accounts suggest the fighting started over a disagreement on money from the chief of staff to be paid out to brigades. Author interviews with an Awlad Suleiman tribal leader and a member of Tubu community, Sabha, September 2013.
- ⁸ Author interview with a representative of the Awlad Suleiman, Niamey, November 2013.
- ⁹ Author interviews with the head of the Tendé brigade (a former senior officer of Maghawir Brigade) and a member of the Maghawir/Tendé Brigade, Ubari, September 2013.
- ¹⁰ Author interview with a Tuareg leader, Tripoli, June 2012.
- ¹¹ Author interview with the head of the Tendé Brigade, Ubari, September 2013.
- ¹² Author interviews with Tuareg notables, Tripoli and Ubari, February and September 2013.
- ¹³ Author interviews with Nigerien officials, Niamey, February and November 2013, and with the head of the Tendé Brigade, Ubari, September 2013.
- ¹⁴ Author interviews with Tuareg representatives, Tripoli and Ubari, September 2013 and January 2014.
- ¹⁵ Author interviews with Tuareg representatives, Tripoli and Ubari, February and September 2013.
- ¹⁶ Author interviews with Tubu representatives, Tripoli, June 2012 and September 2013; Niamey, November 2013.
- ¹⁷ Author interviews with Tubu representatives, Tripoli, June and November 2012.
- ¹⁸ The clashes erupted after a Tubu faction killed Mansour al-Aswad, an Awlad Suleiman militia leader allegedly implicated in the March 2012 fighting.
- ¹⁹ Author interview with the head of a Tubu border guards unit, Sabha, September 2013.
- ²⁰ Examples include the former deputy defense minister Sadiq al-Ghithi and the federalist militia leader Ibrahim Jadhan. Interviews with Tubu representatives, Tripoli and Murzuq, February and September 2013.
- ²¹ Author interviews with Tubu notables and politicians, Niamey and Agadez, November 2013.
- ²² Wardagou's brother Ali Sida is an advisor to Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou.
- ²³ Author interviews with a Tubu activist, Tripoli, September 2013, and with Nigerien officials and Tubu representatives, Niamey and Agadez, November 2013.
- ²⁴ Author interviews with local notables, Sabha, September 2013.
- ²⁵ Author interviews with local notables, Sabha and Murzuq, September 2013.
- ²⁶ The Saeqa forces had deployed in March 2012 to intervene in the conflict between Tubu and Awlad Suleiman groups.
- ²⁷ Author interviews with local community representatives, Sabha, September 2013.

- ²⁸ Author interviews with representatives of southern communities, Tripoli, January 2014.
- ²⁹ Author interviews with a Tuareg notable, Tripoli, February 2013, and with the leader of a Tuareg brigade, Sabha, September 2013.
- ³⁰ Author interviews with local officials and notables, Ubari and Sabha, September 2013.
- ³¹ Author interview with the head of the Tendé Brigade, Ubari, September 2013.
- ³² Author interview with a Tuareg notable, Ubari, September 2013.
- ³³ Author interviews with government officials and Tubu representatives, Niamey and Agadez, November 2013.
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