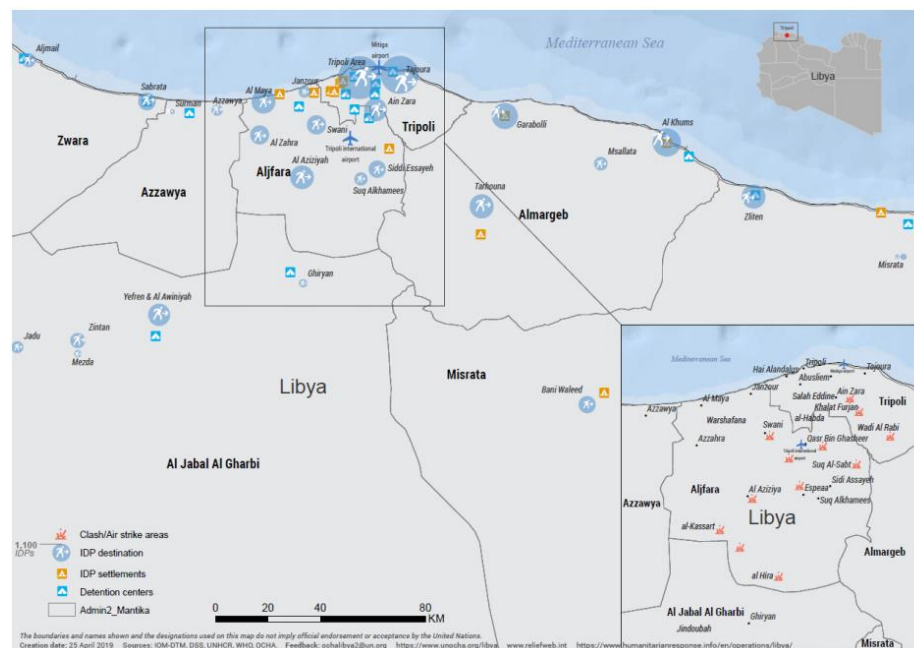# LIBYA
Escalation of conflict in the northwest

In April 2019 conflict between the Libyan National Army (LNA) aligned to the government in the east and the opposing UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), based in the northwest of Libya, escalated in and around the capital Tripoli. Clashes between the LNA, the GNA and their respective allied forces have affected 1.5 million people and displaced over 37,600. Around 90 civilian casualties have been reported, including at least 21 deaths. Key humanitarian needs include safe access to healthcare, and protection and shelter assistance. Migrants and refugees in Tripoli have been particularly impacted by the conflict due to their vulnerable status. Infrastructure, including water and power facilities, has been damaged. Severe movement restrictions have impacted civilian access to services, and humanitarian operations.

Conflict escalated on 4 April after Khalifa Haftar, commander of the LNA, announced an offensive on Tripoli where the GNA is based. At the time of publication of this report, the conflict has entered its third week.

Since 20 April, fighting has intensified. Use of more sophisticated war weapons including drones is reported, suggesting possible international support to the parties (REUTERS 20/04/2019). Initially, clashes were mainly in the southern outskirts of Tripoli and cities around Tripoli. However, LNA forces have been making advancements towards the centre of the capital and attacks have also occurred in more densely populated areas in the south and east of Tripoli (REUTERS 20/04/2019; REUTERS 18/04/2019; REUTERS 22/04/2019). GNA forces have been able to push back the LNA in some areas (REUTERS 23/04/2019). Frontlines are highly fluid. Overall, neither side appears to be gaining ground over the other (Libya Herald 12/04/2019). In addition to ground fighting, both sides of the conflict have launched daily air raids (Al Jazeera 14/04/2019). These have hit civilian infrastructure and densely populated residential areas (REUTERS 18/04/2019). Fighting between forces allied to the LNA and GNA, as well other groups who have been taking advantage of the chaos such as IS, in other locations further east and in the south of Libya is reported but these have remained scattered incidents until now (The Conversation 10/04/2019; REUTERS 18/04/2019).

Source: OCHA 25/04/2011

Key priorities

Escalation: offensive on Tripoli

On 4 April, Khalifa Haftar called his troops to march on Tripoli and take over the capital and the entire northwest of Libya from the GNA. The order was immediately followed and Haftar's operation "Flood of Dignity" was launched. The GNA responded with a counter-offensive "Volcano of Anger" and heavy clashes broke out between the opposing forces (REUTERS 07/04/2019). The GNA has received support from a range of northwest-based militias that have united over opposition to a military rule, including the well-equipped sizeable Misratan groups. The armed groups from Misrata are seen as Haftar's strongest opponents (The Economist 05/04/2019). This escalation of fighting in Tripoli has launched Libya's conflict into a new phase and is seen as the most serious episode of violence since the start of the civil war in 2014, raising concerns for a long-drawn-out siege of the capital.

The offensive took opponents of the LNA and the international community by surprise, despite longstanding threats from Haftar to take over the capital (The Economist 11/04/2019). Haftar's forces were thought to be overstretched and not strong enough to win a conflict in Tripoli (SWP 08/02/2019). It is unclear why Haftar decided to make his move now. The attack came in the midst of a visit by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who was in Tripoli to support a national reconciliation conference. The conference aimed to lay out a roadmap to resolve Libya's conflict and unify the political institutions which are broadly divided between the northwest and the east of the country. Haftar would have entered the conference as the dominant political force holding a strong position to negotiate his role in a new Libyan government ahead of the national elections initially planned for the end of this year (Foreign Policy 10/04/2019). At first it seemed he wanted to use the operation to strengthen his position in the conference. However, given the force being used in the current offensive, and Haftar's disregard of multiple UN pleas to stop his campaign, it is unlikely that was his intention (Financial Times 11/04/2019).

Haftar may have been encouraged by his recent, and relatively easy, military success in the oil-rich southern region of Libya, specifically the Fezzan regions (The Economist 11/04/2019). In February-March the LNA expanded its territory to about two-thirds of the country, giving Haftar control of most international border crossings. Haftar also took control of two large oilfields in the Murzuq district securing control over most of Libya's oil resources (The Guardian 11/04/2019). Apart from localised skirmishes between LNA forces and the ethnic Toubou population, few casualties were reported during the campaign.

Overall, Haftar faced little resistance to his offensive in the south. The south of Libya had long been neglected by the GNA, leaving the southerners feeling abandoned amidst the growing insecurity in the region and a widespread shutdown of public services. Fezzan region is home to smuggling groups and militias, and ethnic and tribal fighting is commonplace. The LNA insists that the advancement was not a power grab, rather an effort to clear southern Libya of foreign fighters, militias, and Islamist groups (The Economist 16/02/2019). Communities in Fezzan welcomed Haftar's promise to establish order. Local militias either supported the LNA ranks or laid low. In order to strengthen his support, Haftar used a strategy of negotiation and buying the loyalty of tribal leaders. The advancement in the south did not trigger a strong response from the GNA and other opponents in the northwest, thereby allowing Haftar to consolidate his position. Although the territorial control over the south remains fragile, as it relies on the cooperation of local armed groups, it represented the first real change in the balance of power in Libya since the LNA's advancement in the Jufra region in 2017 (SWP 08/02/2019; REUTERS 03/06/2017).

Leading up to the offensive in Tripoli, Haftar extended his strategy of trying to co-opt different groups by negotiating with local communities in the northwest and offering financial and military support. He also pushed Operation Flood of Dignity as a campaign to push out "terrorists" and militias. With this ideological narrative, he seeks to sway local groups by making them believe that once they join the LNA they become "the army", an "official" force fighting to create stability. In turn, any local opponents they may have fought against for resources or local power *de facto* become "terrorists" or the enemy of the army (Al Jazeera 07/04/2019). Somewhat ironically, Haftar's own troops are joined by estimated hundreds of Salafist Islamists (REUTERS 15/04/2019). Simultaneously, in the weeks before the offensive, Haftar built up his forces in central Libya and reportedly sent weapons to western LNA outposts in preparation (Crisis Group 10/04/2019).

It is believed that Haftar received international support to enable this offensive on the capital. However, the extent to which international allies may have provided practical support is not clear (Aljazeera 15/04/2019). The UN has accused the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of shipping weapons to LNA's factions in violation of an international arms embargo (Independent 16/04/2019). Saudi Arabia has reportedly offered Haftar tens of millions of US dollars to help the operation. The offer came days before the start of the campaign during Haftar's visit to Riyadh (Wall Street Journal 12/04/2019). Egypt, in turn, who sees the LNA as a strong force against Islamist groups, has confirmed its political support for Haftar's efforts "to create stability in Libya" (REUTERS 15/04/2019), while Russia, as well as the US, vetoed a UN Security Council statement to condemn Haftar's advance on Tripoli. The US also publicly confirmed its support for Haftar's operation (Aljazeera 15/04/2019; REUTERS 19/04/2019). The role of France, which has oil assets in eastern Libya, has been ambiguous. On the surface it seems to be supporting the UN-backed government (REUTERS 18/04/2019). However, it blocked a draft EU resolution that would have condemned Haftar and called for him to retreat (The Guardian 11/04/2019). The GNA has since announced the halt of its security cooperation with France (The Libya Observer 18/04/2019).

Humanitarian impact

Clashes between rival forces are impacting 1.5 million civilians living in and around Tripoli (UNICEF 13/04/2019). Disproportionate and indiscriminate use of explosive weapons have forced some 37,600 people to flee from their homes in highly populated areas of Tripoli. As of 25 April, 90 civilian casualties have been reported including 21 deaths (along with two children) and others injured. Casualties are expected to increase as the fighting advances towards the city centre and both parties of conflict are using airstrikes and heavy artillery (OCHA 25/04/2019).
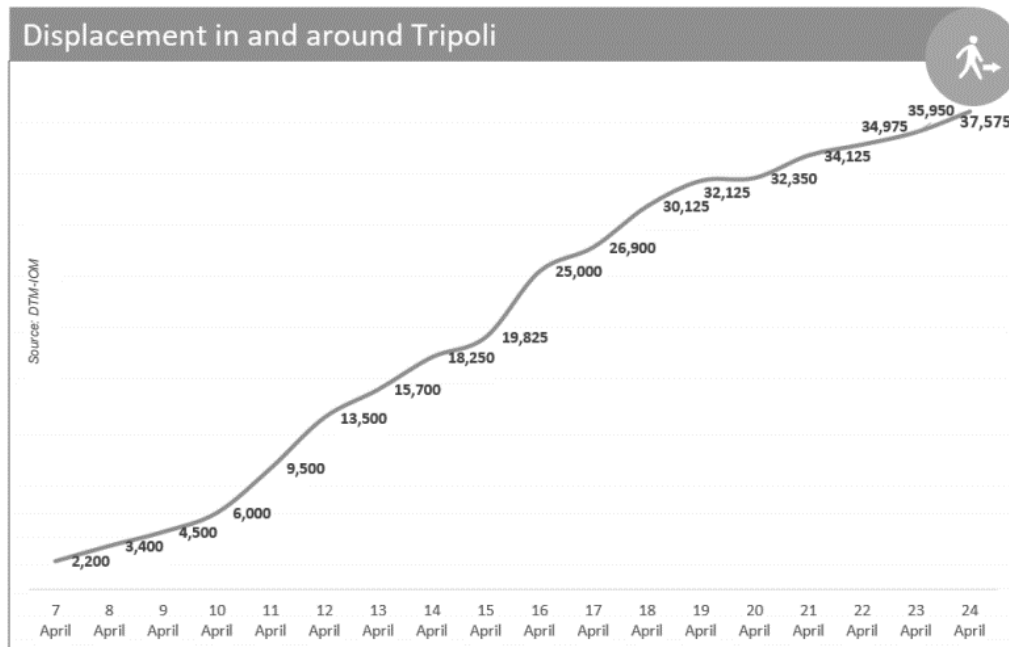
Source: OCHA 25/04/2019

Limited information is currently available on the needs and the severity of the needs of the people affected by the conflict. Key sectors identified are health, protection and shelter. Food, WASH and education needs are also reported.

Health: Safe access to healthcare is a priority need in conflict-affected areas in and around Tripoli. Health workers and ambulance vehicles have been directly targeted by the fighting forces resulting in the deaths of three health workers, the injury of one (Libya Herald 12/04/2019), and the destruction of 11 ambulance vehicles (OCHA 21/04/2019). Medical

workers have pulled out of the emergency operations as a result of the high risks (OCHA 14/04/2019). A private clinic has been damaged by a rocket attack (OCHA 19/04/2019).

Frontline and referral hospitals inside and outside of Tripoli are receiving daily casualties and are reportedly overworked, unable to keep up with the number of people in need of treatment (OCHA 14/04/2019). Some hospitals are not functional, while the rest suffer from an acute shortage of medicine, medical supplies, and equipment along with critical shortages of medical staff, particularly specialist nurses, midwives and technicians (HNO 2019). Emergency care has been widely unavailable. Access to health facilities depends on the intensity of the fighting in the area and restriction of movement (REACH 17/04/2019).

Children and caregivers who have been evacuated from the conflict zone are showing signs of distress and trauma and are in need of psycho-social services (PSS) (OCHA 14/04/2019).

Prior to the escalation, Tripoli was already struggling with an overstretched and underdeveloped healthcare system as a result of years of instability and episodes of conflict in the capital. Healthcare facilities are not able to provide sufficient care to the 554,000 people in the whole of Libya in critical need of healthcare assistance because of the poor quality of services, low capacity of the workforce and shortages of essential drugs and supplies. Migrants, people with special needs, and people living in rural communities have particularly faced difficulties in receiving proper healthcare (HNO 2019).

Protection: Violations of international humanitarian law and indiscriminate attacks against civilians amid this ongoing offensive have raised grave protection concerns. Concerns are high for the thousands of civilians and migrants stranded in close proximity of the conflict. As of 17 April only 60% of the families (REACH 17/04/2019) who have requested evacuation assistance, could be brought to safety due to ongoing clashes and use of heavy artillery (OCHA 14/04/2019). Some 1,800 children are among the civilians urgently in need of evacuation from conflict-affected areas (OCHA 20/04/2019). Many of those who have been able to flee have reportedly displaced to areas close to the frontline, where they remain at risk of violence (REACH 17/04/2019).

According to the UN, people in Tripoli who are originally from the east of Libya are at increased risk of being targeted for killing, kidnapping and arbitrary arrests because of their perceived potential affiliation with the LNA or involvement in the conflict (OCHA 19/04/2019). Houses of IDPs have reportedly been looted or destroyed based on the believed political affiliated of the resident (REACH 17/04/2019).

As of 25 April, some 3,300 of migrants and refugees in overcrowded detention centres close to the frontline are trapped, of whom 27% are children (OCHA 18/04/2019; OCHA 25/04/2019). In some cases, guards have joined the fighting and have abandoned detainees, leaving them in deplorable conditions without access to basic supplies (OCHA

14/04/2019). Media sources have reported on migrants using hidden phones to call for help, claiming they are running out of water and food supplies (Al Jazeera 14/04/2019). Figures published by OCHA on the number of migrants trapped in close proximity to the clashes refer only to migrants staying in official detention centres run by GNA officials. Numbers on migrants who may be detained in clandestine centres close to the frontline are not available.

LNA fighters have indiscriminately shot at detained migrants. At least 10 people were seriously wounded and are in urgent need of medical treatment (Al Jazeera 24/04/2019). There are reports that armed groups running detention centres are recruiting migrants to support militias aligned with the GNA by moving and loading weapons, cleaning cars impacted by violence, and taking part in the fighting (The Guardian 15/04/2019).

Insecurity was a key concern in Libya before the onset of the fighting. Violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including attacks against civilians, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, and torture, are widespread and committed by all parties to the conflict (OCHA October 2018). Some 490,000 people in Libya were reported in acute need of protection before the escalation of the conflict in Tripoli (HNO 2019).

Migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to extreme violence by Libyan security forces, militias, smuggling networks, and criminal gangs (UNOHCHR 20/12/2018, Women's Refugee Commission 21/03/2019). Libya's instability, as well as its strategic location, have allowed smuggling and human trafficking networks, dominated by armed groups, to flourish. The country has become a gateway for migrants hoping to cross to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route. Libya currently counts 666,717 migrants and refugees, mostly Sub-Saharan and North African nationals, many of whom face brutal conditions including severe abuse and torture, overcrowded detention centres, and kidnapping along the way (IOM February 2018; UNOHCHR 20/12/2018).

Shelter: Over 37,600 people are currently displaced by the clashes (OCHA 25/04/2019). Some displaced families are staying with extended family members or in abandoned warehouses, factories and schools (REUTERS 16/04/2019). Others have found shelter in centres established by Tripoli Crisis Management Committee (UNICEF 13/04/2019). As the conflict advances further towards the city centre, current collective shelters might soon come under fire, putting displaced families at risk of onward displacement. The identification of new shelter places is needed (OCHA 11/04/2019). The number of IDPs is increasing at a fast rate. In the second week of fighting twice as many people were displaced compared to the number displaced during the first week. This growing rate of displacement signifies a clear need for additional IDP shelters.

'Fallah 2' IDP settlement in Tripoli was used as a base to shoot at a military plane, endangering the lives of the civilians living in the camp (OCHA 14/04/2019). It is unclear how many people are currently staying in Fallah 2 but UNHCR reported some 850 people in January 2019 (UNHCR 18/01/2019).

Shelter needs are particularly high for migrants and refugees, as they do not usually have the same network of friends and families to rely on as the Libyans. Additionally, they are reported to face discrimination to access collective shelters (OCHA 20/04/2019).

Food: People's access to food is severely restricted in conflict-affected areas. Many marketplaces and local traders are no longer operating and people's food stocks are running low (REACH 17/04/2019). Food assistance is a key need for migrants stuck in detention centres close to the conflict (OCHA 20/04/2019).

WASH: Access to clean drinking is a key concern. Bottled water is the main source of drinking water in conflict-affected areas. Water from the public network in some areas is only available 1- 3 days per week as a result of the fighting disrupting the supply. Moreover, the water provided through the public network is undrinkable and needs purification (REACH 17/04/2019).

There is a risk of an outbreak of infectious disease due to dirty water and the increasing number of people displaced who have access to limited services (REUTERS 12/04/2019).

Very poor hygiene and sanitation conditions and a severe lack of drinkable water continue to affect the health of migrants in detention centres (REACH 17/04/2019; OCHA 22/04/2019).

Health concerns are also raised because of the breakdown of the waste management system in conflict-affected areas. Waste is currently burned, buried or dumped (REACH 17/04/2019).

Education: Most schools in conflict-affected areas have been closed, impacting 122,088 children in nine municipalities (UNICEF 20/04/2019). Families have been keeping their children from going to the schools that have remained open because of insecurity on the roads. A number of schools have been damaged by shelling and one was hit by an airstrike. Schools have also been used as IDP shelters or as military bases by armed groups (REACH 17/04/2019).

An airstrike hit a Ministry of Education warehouse in the south of Tripoli severely damaging the building and destroying over four million copies of textbooks for basic and secondary education (The Libya Observer 15/04/2019; OCHA 14/04/2019).

Impact on infrastructure

Indiscriminate use of heavy artillery has left civilian infrastructure partly damaged or destroyed. Impacted infrastructure includes houses, schools, mosques, road networks, markets and the international airport in Tripoli (REACH 17/04/2019, OCHA 21/04/2019).

The fighting has left at least 16 power lines out of service, causing a total blackout in several areas of south Tripoli. There are warnings that the entire western region of Libya

may face a total blackout if any of the electrical circuits become damaged (The Libya Observer 16/04/2019).

Humanitarian access

Operational constraints

Access to the capital is severely restricted as a result of the fighting. Thousands of civilians remain trapped in and around the frontline in the southern outskirts of Tripoli, unable to leave due to the ongoing hostilities, despite having requested evacuation assistance.

Emergency service providers are unable to reach people in need because of the ongoing clashes, indiscriminate use of weapons, and targeted attacks on aid workers. In some conflict-affected areas, relief workers have been denied access to people in need by armed groups.

Health workers, including doctors and ambulance staff, have been deliberately targeted during the clashes, resulting in the withdrawal of medical workers from the rescue operations (OCHA 14/04/2019). Movement away from the frontline is also restricted because of the blockage of all main roads by checkpoints and dirt barriers. A shortage of fuel has made it increasingly difficult to move (REACH 17/04/2019; OCHA 20/04/2019).

Access issues hamper the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to migrants and refugees in detention centres in close proximity to the conflict. They are trapped and without any access to assistance (OCHA 14/04/2019). For migrants who are not detained, the lack of private transportation has made it nearly impossible to leave conflict-affected areas without assistance (REACH 17/04/2019). Refugees, IDPs and migrants who are stranded or fleeing southern Tripoli as a result of the clashes are in need of information on emergency medical assistance, evacuation to safe areas, access to assistance shelter (OCHA 14/04/2019).

Bureaucratic impediments have halted the clearance of medical supplies entering the country (OCHA 23/04/2019).

The resurgence of the conflict in Tripoli has led to the temporary shutdown of Mitiga International Airport, the only functioning airport in the city, on several occasions since the onset of the conflict (The New York Times 09/04/2019; REUTERS 21/04/2019). At the time of publication, the airport is open but the timing and frequency of flights is unclear.

Insecurity throughout the country has greatly limited humanitarian access in Libya. The implementation of humanitarian activities remains unpredictable due to multiple factors including presence of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive devices, threats of kidnapping of international personnel, and proliferation of armed groups with no clear chain of command Additional factors hindering humanitarian access include administrative as well as physical constraints, such as destruction of road infrastructure and power cuts that cause sporadic breakdown in telecommunications (HNO 2019).

Response capacities

Although the evacuation status in Tripoli was lifted in February 2018, a limited number of international aid agencies currently have presence in Tripoli. Many organisations still operate from Tunisia, leading to coordination and communication challenges that are impacting the response operations in Libya (HRP 2019). International organisations currently responding to the conflict are UN agencies OCHA, UNHCR, IOM and WHO among others (OCHA 14/04/2019). International NGOs such as MSF, IRC and ICRC, in partnership with the local societies, have presence in Tripoli. The humanitarian community works together with national and local authorities such as the Tripoli Crisis Management Committee, municipalities and civil society organisations (HRP 2019). The ongoing conflict has however severely stretched the services of local partners, putting a strain on the response capacity. The local medical response capacity is especially limited due to under-developed healthcare institutions and the lack of supplies and staff (The New Humanitarian 15/04/2019).

Resilience and coping strategies

Libya has been suffering from a protracted humanitarian crisis since 2011 affecting 1.6 million people in the country. Prior to the escalation of conflict in April 2019, some 823,000 people were estimated in need of humanitarian assistance including 188,000 people living in Tripoli. Some 172,500 people were already internally displaced by the violence in Libya. Both displaced and non-displaced populations have faced significant shortages of food, fuel, water, medical supplies and electricity as well as reduced access to healthcare and public services (OCHA October 2018; IOM February 2018).

Almost eight years of conflict and instability has left its mark on the population's resilience, forcing many to adopt multiple negative coping mechanisms. Such mechanisms may include relying on savings, borrowing money, reducing the number of meals a day and selling non-productive assets, as well as begging and socially degrading, exploitive, high risk, or illegal work including prostitution. As a result, many people living in Libya are becoming increasingly less able to withstand the economic impacts of the crisis (HNO 2019).

Information on the sorts of coping mechanisms used by the people affected by the current escalation of conflict is not available. However, given Tripoli's already stretched services and limited institutions, it is safe to assume that the recent upsurge of violence has and will continue to have a significant impact on people's already strained resilience.

Contextual information

Background of the crisis and key stakeholders

Eight years after the Libyan uprising that overthrew the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya remains a chaotic and fragile state. During his rule, Gaddafi maintained tight control over all power and oil-wealth in the country and established few national institutions. After the uprising, no authority has managed to take full control over the country which led to a power vacuum in Libya opening the way for different (militia) groups and (local) factions to vie for influence. As a result, Libya's political landscape has been heavily fragmented and ruled by many competing actors on the national and local level (MEI 04/03//2019).

Libya's current political scene is broadly divided between two rival governments, neither of which are considered fully legitimate by all sides of the conflict. The Government of National Accord (GNA), led by prime minister Fayez Serraj, is based in Tripoli and operates in the northwest. The GNA is the UN-recognised administration brought in by a UN-brokered deal in December 2015. The GNA is often described as a "paper government" with no real influence as it does not have any official forces under its own command.

The House of Representatives (HoR), the government in the east, was chosen in June 2014 in a national election with low turnout. Based in the eastern city of Tobruk, the HoR is supported by the Libyan National Army (LNA) and its leader, General Khalifa Haftar. The LNA is effectively an alliance composed of military units and tribal or regional-based armed groups. It grew out of Operation Dignity, an ongoing offensive against Islamists that Haftar launched in 2014. The LNA has a stronghold on the east of Libya and control over the south and some parts in central Libya.

The battle over territory, resources, and key infrastructure between militias and forces loyal to the opposing governments resulted in ongoing civil war, fuelled in part by international interference, and complicated by tribal dynamics and the involvement of extremist forces such as Islamic State (IS). Armed conflict escalated in the summer of 2014 when Haftar's Operation Dignity was countered by a coalition of Islamist militants and armed groups, called Operation Libya Dawn, and fighting broke out at Tripoli's International airport (Council of Foreign Relations 2019). The fighting, that lasted for several months, was followed by episodes of intense conflict between rival forces in Benghazi, Sirte, Tripoli and Derna in the years after (HNO 2019). Since September 2018, fighting has remained localised and small scale, until the recent offensive on Tripoli.

Drivers of the crisis

Reliance of GNA and LNA on militias and fluid alliances

Militia groups are active across Libya. Many militias were formed on the basis of local communities who resisted Gaddafi in the 2011 uprising. It is unknown how many militia personnel and groups are active but estimates range between 140,000 and 250,000 men (Al Jazeera 18/10/2018; Telegraph 08/02/2019). Many militia groups control key infrastructure and territories in Libya. Both governments rely heavily on the support of local militias to exert their power on the ground. Militia groups are in some cases aligned to the LNA or the GNA but in other cases are not aligned to either and are pursuing their own objectives of claiming resources and territory control. Much of Libya's conflict can be attributed to disputes over historic grievances, political differences and economic interests between local communities and their allied militias. Allegiances to other militia groups and to either of the governments are subject to local territorial and political interests. Militias may defect to another authority for financial or political advantage (The Guardian 21/03/2019).

Oil Production

Libya holds the largest oil reserves in Africa (REUTERS 13/12/2015). The Libyan economy depends heavily on oil production, with oil accounting for 60% of gross domestic product (GDP), 98% of exports and 96% of government revenue in the years leading up to the 2011 uprising (World Bank March 2015). The country's instability has caused oil production to heavily fluctuate over the years (Bloomberg 08/04/2019).

Control over oil resources has been at the core of the conflict. Whoever controls the oil effectively controls Libya's wealth. Technically, the Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation (NOC) is the sole body controlling the oil and gas field operations and the only seller of Libyan oil abroad. However, the political splintering since 2014 has complicated the situation. Factions have used their territorial control over oil facilities to leverage political and financial demands (REUTERS 11/04/2019). Security incidents such as kidnapping of oil workers often lead to the NOC declaring *force majeure* on crude oil loadings, cutting the production (REUTERS 17/12/2019).

International involvement

International actors have been heavily invested in their financial and political interests in Libya. Most of the international stakeholders have an ambiguous role, facilitating peace discussions between the GNA and the LNA while more or less openly supporting one side. Key stakeholders are Egypt, UAE, Russia, France, and since the Tripoli offensive, Saudi Arabia and the US who are backing the LNA. Qatar, Turkey and Italy are supporting the GNA.

The extensive involvement of international actors has been crucial to the political dynamics in Libya. According to the UN, up to 10 countries are intervening in Libya and supplying arms to different parties of the conflict despite the UN arms embargo (The Libya Observer 28/03/2019). Without the support of his international allies, Haftar would not have been able to gain as much power as he did. Over the years, Haftar has received military support in the form of airstrikes, equipment and weapons as well as financial support which he used to pay his forces (The Libya Observer 20/11/2018; REUTERS 11/04/2019; MEMO 06/04/2019).

Outlook on the conflict

Libya faces the prospect of a protracted conflict in the northwest of the country. Taking control of Tripoli will not be easy for Haftar. By launching a surprise offensive, Haftar had hoped to advance on Tripoli before his opponents had the time to mobilise. However, the GNA has been joined by several strong militia groups from in and around Tripoli, providing strong resistance to the offensive

It is believed that the LNA's resources are stretched following the recent campaign in the southern region of Libya. In order to maintain territorial control, Haftar would have to deliver on his promise of creating and maintaining stability for communities in the south as well as the east of the country, ensuring their popular support. As most of the LNA's forces have been moved to Tripoli, the south of Libya is currently facing a security vacuum. Since the offensive, media sources have reported several attacks in the south by IS who have taken advantage of the chaos (MEE 10/04/2019).

Stretched resources as well as a potential loss of territory in the south could mean a potential defeat for Haftar who may have made a serious miscalculation going in to the Tripoli offensive. However, military and financial support from his international allies such as the UEA and Saudi Arabia, seem to have enabled Haftar to make a push further into Tripoli in recent days which has led to an intensification of the fighting. At this point, it seems that the GNA and the LNA are equally matched, making it probable that escalation will grow into a protracted conflict and possible prolonged siege of the capital with serious humanitarian consequences.

A further escalation of the conflict, especially as clashes are moving toward the more densely populated city centre, could trigger a severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation. With around two-thirds of Libyans living in the northwest, the conflict has impacted a large population. Tripoli alone counts around 940,600 inhabitants (Bureau of Statistics and Census Libya 2012).

As the conflict worsens it is likely that access will be even more restricted, putting a large amount of people at high risk of being trapped in the violence and not receiving the assistance needed. The possible use of more sophisticated weapons, provided by international allies, is likely to increase the civilian causalities as well as damage to civilian infrastructure.

The number of IDPs will continue to grow as the conflict progresses. Until now, it has been unclear how many people have fled Libya since the offensive. Tunisian authorities have reported several hundreds of Libyan vehicles crossing the Tunisian border in the West of Libya since the onset of the conflict – however, these were not exclusively civilians (Al Jazeera 09/04/2019). As long as the border remains open, it is likely that the number of civilians fleeing Libya will increase.