

Misrata Militia In Tripoli Clashes With Local Group:

Clashes in central Tripoli on 3 January between the local al-Zawiyah militia and elements of the Misrata Military Council (MMC) left four dead and at least six injured. Council leaders have described Misratan involvement as the work of individuals, not the MMC itself, but this is still the first time that Misratan militiamen have been involved in violence in Tripoli. Protests in the capital against the presence of regional militias in the city have strengthened the position of local groups in recent weeks.

The al-Zawiyah militia is linked to Abdel-Hakim Belhadj, who is from the capital and leads the 20,000-strong Tripoli Military Council (TMC). Belhadj, a former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), led the National Transitional Council's (NTC) assault on Tripoli. However, we do not believe the incident reflects particular tensions between the MMC and TMC; rather, the Misratans were reportedly seeking to free one of their own who had been detained by the al-Zawiyah group.

Meanwhile, the NTC appointed Deputy Defence Minister Colonel (now General) Youssef al-Mangoush as the new Army Chief of Staff on 3 January. He replaces General Khalifa Haftar who, since his unofficial appointment by 150 officers in November, had become increasingly unpopular due to his efforts to increase his own power and to disarm militias (reported last time).

The selection of al-Mangoush is controversial; two relatively small militias have opposed it, claiming that he is not on a list of candidates submitted to the NTC. Haftar was a Benghazi native and one of the militias that spoke out against al-Mangoush is from the East and so the appointment may further exacerbate East-West tensions. Al-Mangoush also has strong ties with the recently-appointed Defence Minister, Osama al-Juwaili, who leads the Zintan Military Committee (ZMC) which is aligned with the Tripoli Revolutionary Council (TRC) led by Abdullah Naker (also known as Abdullah al-Zintani). His appointment strengthens the hand of the ZMC, which succeeded in forcing Khalifa Haftar from office by targeting him and his sons (reported last time).

Zintan now firmly controls the Defence Ministry and could seek to disarm rival groups through the department. Other militias are likely to resist any such effort, which would further destabilise Libya and draw it closer to a civil war (a term openly used by NTC Chairman Mustafa Abdul Jalil earlier this month). These developments highlight the NTC's continued inability to rein in militias and ensure stability in the run-up to the summer elections.

Abdullah Naker, meanwhile, highlighted the threat of Gadhafi loyalists to Libya in this period, claiming that the TRC had captured nine loyalists intending to destroy Tripoli's power grid on 31 December - a claim we do not believe to be credible. He also threatened to close both Egyptian diplomatic facilities in Libya and the border if Cairo did not stop Nilesat from regularly broadcasting Gadhafi-era speeches, after a few minutes of an address appeared on Nilesat before the transmission was interrupted.

Naker used these incidents to strengthen his position and reputation, since the TRC has itself come under pressure to disarm after recent clashes with Belhadj's TMC. By claiming to have arrested Gadhafi loyalists and then threatening Egypt, Naker and the TRC justify not only their presence in Tripoli but also demonstrate the

militia's influence. He has since also declared that he will soon create a political party.

Ends.