Demystifying Gray Zone Conflict: A Typology of Conflict Dyads and Instruments of Power in Libya, 2014-Present

Report to DHS S&T Office of University Programs and DoD Strategic Multilayer Assessment Branch

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Executive Summary

This case study is intended to highlight the dynamics of Gray Zone conflict in Libya since 2014. It places specific emphasis on the roles of non-state actors within the conflict and how these actors utilize different levels of power to achieve their aims. With a focus on analyzing the dyadic relationships between various types of conflict actors, this research examines which types of dyads employ which instruments of power, as well as to what extent these activities fall within the Gray Zone of conflict as opposed to the more precisely delineated Black and White arenas. This research aims to assist practitioners and policy makers in determining how the types of actors involved in a conflict can influence which instruments of power deserve special consideration in that conflict. This investigation will also aid Special Operations Forces (SOF) in determining which types of belligerents may make effective partners depending on the type of adversary faced, and which instruments of power SOF should train and equip these partners to implement.

This research substantially bounds the scope of what needs to be considered by U.S. forces operating in these environments. Specifically, the analysis shows that aggregating by actor-type is effective. Aggregating Libya's myriad actors into four distinct groups, which include internationally recognized governing bodies, rival political factions (hereby referred to as "rival governments"), local religiously-affiliated violent non-state actors (VSNAs) and transnational VSNAs (e.g. the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)), allows practitioners to identify the most relevant instruments of power at play given the actor-types engaged in the conflict. Moreover, this analysis reduces the number of instruments of power that must be thoroughly considered in each conflict dyad from seven to an average of 4.5. Of these 4.5, an average of just 2 instruments of power are especially salient.

Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates that Libya's conflict is Gray. While Gray Zone dynamics also include White and Black activities, all four of the dyads involve Gray activities. This study finds that competition between the elected and/or internationally recognized governing bodies and rival governments primarily occur across the diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial and legal instruments of power. The situation in Libya is such that competing political groups have all had periods of international recognition and legitimacy at certain times and not others. During periods where a government has international recognition and legitimacy, it tends to prioritize White Zone diplomatic engagement and legal activities. When rival political groups are not internationally recognized, they have employed Gray Zone diplomatic negotiations, information engagement and financial activity in addition to Black Zone military and economic action.

Religiously affiliated VSNAs (including ISIL and al-Qaeda (AQ) affiliates) are also involved in the conflict. Notably, information engagement occurring within the Gray Zone is the most potent instrument of power used by such groups regardless of the adversary, followed by Black Zone military action. When competing against government aligned forces, these VSNAs have similarly engaged in Gray Zone financial activity. Local VSNAs have engaged in Gray Zone diplomatic negotiations with international actors. In its competition against government-aligned forces, ISIL has employed Black Zone economic activities.

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When evaluating responses to conflicts involving governments and rival governments, practitioners should devote significant attention to the use of diplomatic and legal instruments of power as they have proven to be especially consequential. When addressing dyads involving religiously-affiliated VNSAs, practitioners should pay particular attention to the informational and military instruments of power, as these instruments of power influence the use of the other instruments.

While the approach adopted by this research entails myriad advantages, readers should be cautioned that Gray Zone conflicts are extremely complex. Practitioners ought to consider how an intervention against one type of conflict actor might affect other types of actors operating in the same space. This is necessary to avoid negative externalities, such as inadvertently strengthening other combatants. Moreover, commanders must realize that the successful use of certain tactics within one instrument of power (e.g. military), can have profound effects on the efficacy of their opponent's use of other instruments (e.g. economic or informational). Finally this case provides numerous examples of government forces collaborating with various VSNAs. While Special Operations Forces are especially well positioned to do so, this requires extensive situational awareness at the micro-level as the micro and macro conflict landscapes are mutually constitutive and are thus highly reactive to disturbances on all levels. Alliances are fleeting and the willingness to cooperate with Special Operations Forces varies both over space and time.

Introduction

The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism (START) has been tasked with providing support to the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Gray Zone project undertaken as a Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) initiative. This research initiative's starting point is the following working definition of Gray Zones:

> *"The Gray Zone is a conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of power to achieve political-security objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten US and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws."*[1]

This case study elucidates the dynamics of Gray Zone conflict and how coercion and threat assessment operate in light of Gray Zone activities. It does so through a detailed examination of the most recent phase (Second Libyan Civil War, 2014-present) of Libya's post-Qaddafi conflict (2011-present). Studying this period is ideal, as it allows for coverage of a wide variety of different types of conflict actors (rival government forces, non-state armed-groups, jihadists and ISIL), employing multiple instruments of power. On a practical level, this period reflects the most recent conflict landscape possible for this study. Libya offers a different perspective on Gray Zone conflict by breaking with traditional distinctions between state and non-state actors. Specifically, the distribution of power in Libya is unique. In this case, political actors are forced to rely on the VNSAs, which control territory to assert their authority. This context, has led to multiple political groups, each with their own network of VNSAs, declaring themselves as the sole legitimate state authority.

This case study proceeds in four sections. The first provides a descriptive summary and general background information on the conflict. The subsequent section describes the data and methodology employed. The third section is devoted to analyzing the Gray Zone dynamics occurring in each type of conflict dyad. Focus is also directed to understanding which instruments of power are leveraged by the different types of rival governments and non-state armed groups and used for Gray Zone activities. The final section concludes.

Conflict Summary

The Arab Spring protests that swept through the Middle East and North Africa in January of 2011 took just a month to reach Libya. When security forces in Benghazi opened fire on demonstrators in February, the fuse was lit on a powder keg, which resulted from four decades of dictatorial rule by Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi. The first Libyan Civil War (2011) ensued.[2] The revolutionary forces that rose up

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[1] Department of Defense Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment, "Gray Zone Effort Update," September 2016.
[2] Christopher Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy" (Congressional Research Service, May 13, 2016), https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33142.pdf.

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against Qaddafi's regime were met with brutal retaliation, and in March 2011, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) imposed a no-fly zone over the country in an effort to protect civilians.[3] Clashes continued throughout the summer and into the fall before Qaddafi was captured in his hometown of Sirte; the dictator was quickly executed by his captors.

Since the overthrow of Qaddafi, Libya has struggled to establish a new, effective government, capable of providing security, a functioning economy and a path forward. Much of the post-Qaddafi chaos can be attributed to his failure to establish a modern state in Libya, which lacks an active civil society and modern institutions that function in the absence of authoritarian rule.[4] The departure of Qaddafi's regime generated a political and security power vacuum. Myriad different types of VNSAs filled this void.[5] No longer united by a shared objective (removing Qaddafi), tribal, religious, ideological, personal, financial and transnational rivalries have erupted. The diversity of these actors, and their differing visions for Libya's future, contributes to the complexity of the conflict that persists today.

After Gaddafi's ouster, the interim National Transitional Council (NTC) shepherded Libya through the July 2012 elections. The General National Congress (GNC), emerged victorious at the polls. Subsequent elections in 2014 ushered in a new stage of the conflict, when the House of Representatives (HoR), a rival government established to counter the GNC, won the elections with only 16 percent of Libyans casting votes.[6] In May 2015, HoR-appointed anti-Islamist General Khalifa Haftar launched Operation DIGNITY, marking the start of the second Libyan Civil War (2014-present). The Libyan National Army (LNA) led the offensive against the HoR's opponents in Benghazi and eastern Libya, whom they characterized as "terrorists." In response, Libya Dawn, an armed coalition of Islamist and non-Islamist militias formed to oppose the LNA. Libya Dawn was loosely organized under GNC leadership. Conflict over power and resources between rival factions escalated, leading to the collapse of the state and the establishment of two rival groups, both claiming to be Libya's sole legitimate governing authority. After declaring the 2014 elections unconstitutional, Libya Dawn seized control of government headquarters in Tripoli, forcing the HoR to re-establish itself in Tobruk.[7]

In December 2015, the United Nations (UN) brokered the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), which established the Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister-delegate Fayez al-Sarraj. While the GNA is now the internationally recognized government, it has yet to be ratified by both of the previous governments and negotiations have stalled. Al-Sarraj has struggled to assert the authority of the GNA across all of Libya. The GNA, HoR and GNC have all relied upon strategic alliances with coalitions of VNSAs instead of attempting to establish a monopoly on the use of force by creating a national military

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[3] *The Economist*, "That It Should Come to This," January 10, 2015, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21638123-four-year-descent-arab-spring-factional-chaos-it-should-come.

[4] Noureddine Jebnoun, "Beyond the Mayhem: Debating Key Dilemmas in Libya's Statebuilding," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 5 (October 20, 2015): 832–64, doi:10.1080/13629387.2015.1068697.

[5] Paul Staniland, "Armed Groups and Militarized Elections," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 694–705, doi:10.1111/isqu.12195.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."

and cracking down on said VNSAs.[8] In actuality, the VNSAs and not the political groups exert territorial control in Libya. Alliances between militia coalitions comprised of multiple VNSAs and the political groups remain fluid. Specifically, these are alliances of mutual convenience, and infighting and shifting allegiances are common place.[9]

In 2014, ISIL made its first appearance in the eastern Libyan port town of Derna. It has since engaged in large-scale conflict with all three governments, as well as with Islamists and other jihadists. It has threatened Libya's lucrative oil crescent and has expanded into western Libya, attempting to take control of Sirte and the surrounding areas. It has since been pushed out of Derna and much of Sirte by a combination of GNA-allied militias, Dignity forces, an international counter-ISIL force (including the United States) and certain rival jihadist groups.[10] Nevertheless, it continues to maintain a presence in much of Libya, including Benghazi.

While the exact number of casualties remain unknown, at least 600 people were killed in 2015, with 20,000 injured and approximately 2.44 million people in need of humanitarian aid.[11] Fighting has devastated the Libyan economy, with many Libyans living in extreme deprivation.[12] At the time of this writing, it does not appear that rival actors are moving in the direction of reconciliation, and the fragile peace upon which the GNA government was built appears to be crumbling. The remainder of this section endeavors to provide readers with relevant background on the GNA, rival governments and key VNSAs, including coalitions of government-allied militias, jihadists and ISIL.

Rival Governments
General National Congress
On August 8, 2012, just 18 months after the uprising that ousted Qaddafi, the GNC assumed the reins of government in Libya.[13] They faced an uphill battle; for the past four decades, the "official ideology…advocated a ban on political parties, associations of all types, and autonomous courts," and the foundations of a democratic society were far weaker than tribal and regional loyalties.[14] These challenges were reflected in the composition of the new legislature, which was divided between former regime elements and "Islamist-leaning legislators who wanted to purge all former [Qaddafi-era] officials."[15] The

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[8] Staniland, "Armed Groups and Militarized Elections."

[9] *Jason Pack AJE Libya Political Process*, Libya Analysis, accessed October 19, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSEQOzDRppE&feature=youtu.be.

[10] Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State Fighters Retreat from Bases outside Derna, Libya," April 20, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/04/islamic-state-fighters-retreat-from-bases-outside-derna-libya.php.

[11] *Amnesty International*, "Libya 2015/2016," accessed October 21, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/libya/report-libya/.

[12] Christopher Occhicone, "Libya 2015," *Human Rights Watch*, January 11, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/libya.

[13] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."

[14] Rafaa Tabib, "Stealing the Revolution: Violence and Predation in Libya," *Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution*, October 2014, https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Tabib_Clingendael_NOREF_Stealing%20the%20revoulution_Violence%20and%20predation%20in%20Libya_October%202014.pdf

[15] Andrew Engle, "Defeating the Islamic State in Sirte: Secondary Effects and Remaining Challenges," *The Washington Institute*, July 8, 2016, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/defeating-the-islamic-state-in-sirte-secondary-

political clashes in the GNC were reflective of the broader context of the conflict, where militias affiliated with various positions and factions grew increasingly powerful. The largest bloc in Libya Dawn was composed of "city state" forces from the western merchant town of Misrata. They were rivaled by HoR-aligned militants from the neighboring city of Zintan. Libya Dawn also included Islamist and non-Islamist militias, including tribal, revolutionary and jihadist groups. The failure of the new government to strengthen its institutions at the expense of these militias set the stage for the civil war that broke out shortly after the GNC's mandate expired.[16]

House of Representatives

On June 25, 2014, a national election was held to select members of Libya's newly created HoR. Intended to replace the GNC, this parliamentary body, was quickly recognized by the international community as the nation's legitimate government. It nevertheless found its authority challenged by domestic rivals.[17] Opponents of the HoR cited low turnout, a subpar security environment and boycotts organized by a number of political factions in refusing to accept the election results.[18] Political polarization increased in July 2014, when an outbreak of violence around Tripoli's airport prompted the HoR to move the new parliament to the eastern city of Tobruk. Despite compelling security concerns in the capital, this change exacerbated long-simmering east-west divisions and lead to the defection of approximately 30 newly elected members of the body.[19]

These members joined with the remnants ("rump") of the GNC in Tripoli, and the faction announced that they had reconstituted the GNC and proclaimed their group as the true government of Libya.[20] This declaration marked the beginning of the second Libyan Civil War. Each political group proceeded to appoint its own prime minister and cabinet, setting up parallel administrations to accompany the military forces already aligned with Tobruk or Tripoli.

The split between the HoR and GNC and their constituent VNSA forces echoed Libya's 2011 revolutionary period. Some Libyans perceive the HoR as representing the "old guard" from Qaddafi's regime. The presence of former Qaddafi military elements within their allied militia coalition furthers this perception. Support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) fuels concerns that former regime insiders are cooperating with foreign powers in a covert "proxy war" against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), who represent part of the GNC/Libya Dawn coalition. General Haftar feeds this narrative with his emphasis on the Islamist-leanings of the Tripoli-based bloc. In addition to a mix of former military units, the LNA also

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effects-and-remaining-challe; see also Ben Fishman, "The Twin Battle in Libya: Against the Islamic State and for Unity," *The Washington Institute*, accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-twin-battle-in-libya-against-the-islamic-state-and-for-unity.

[16] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."

[17] Ben Fishman, "Libya's Struggle for Stability May Require Greater Western Involvement," *The Washington Institute*, July 11, 2016, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/libyas-struggle-for-stability-may-require-greater-western-involvement.

[18] *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya," January 11, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/libya.

[19] Mary Fitzgerald, "Mapping Libya's Factions," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mappinglibya; Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."

[20] Ibid.

includes tribal militias, "city state" armed groups (including Zintan forces), revolutionary brigades and jihadists.

The Government of National Accord

The GNA was established under the UN-brokered LPA in December 2015, after 14 months of negotiations.[21] The agreement was intended to create a unity government to work towards a solution to the political crisis and called for an immediate ceasefire on both sides. Under LPA mandates, the GNA Executive Branch is to be appointed by a Presidential Council (PC), which acts as the head of state and consists of nine members supposedly representing all Libyan factions. The head of the PC, Prime Minister-delegate Fayez al-Sarraj, has struggled to consolidate support and assert any kind of meaningful authority outside of Tripoli.

The LPA designated the HoR, led by Chairman Aguila Saleh Issa, as the sole legislative authority, with the power to reject proposed members of the new government. The LPA requires that the Tobruk-based House of Representatives endorse the PC-appointed GNA members, but various roadblocks, including the refusal of Haftar to hand over command of the armed forces to the PC, have delayed the still-pending endorsement (see *GNA versus Rivals*, below). Additionally, the agreement called for the establishment of a consultative State Council, largely consisting of members of the rival Government of National Salvation (GNS), headed by Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell. As recently as October 15, 2016 the "rump" of the GNS staged a coup threatening the fragile peace and the future of the GNA (See *GNA versus Rivals*).[22]

The GNA does not control territory outside of Tripoli, and military support for the unity government consists of alliances with pro-GNA militias, most of which are former Libya Dawn affiliates. This includes the Misrata forces currently fighting ISIL in western Libya. While the GNA has struggled to assert its authority outside of Tripoli, two major Tripoli-based economic institutions, the Central Bank and the National Oil Corporation, have pledged their loyalty. Furthermore, statements of support by several militia-controlled "city state" municipalities in the West and South (including Misrata), have helped al-Sarraj establish a power base in those areas.[23] It is unclear if these municipalities will remain cooperative once ISIL is pushed out of the west, or if attention will once again shift to assuming power over HoR rivals in the east.

Islamists/Jihadists

Despite their differing ideologies and objectives, the following actors are aggregated for the purpose of this study, due to their mutual opposition to Haftar and his Dignity forces. This list does not include political Islamists (such as the MB), as the political elements of these movements are represented in the

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[21] "Libya 2015/2016."

[22] Chris Stephen, "Libya Coup Attempt as Tripoli Militias Seek to Topple UN-Backed Government," *The Guardian*, October 14, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/15/libya-coup-attempt-as-tripoli-militias-seek-to-topple-un-backed-government?CMP=twt_gu.

[23] Richard Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention," *Moon of Alabama*, March 29, 2016, http://www.moonofalabama.org/2016/03/richard-galustian-on-libya.html#3.

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above discussion, and their militant elements are subsumed within the various armed groups discussed below.

Ansar al-Sharia

Islamic fighting groups have been active in in Libya since the mid-1990s, when fighters returning from Afghanistan formed the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) to challenge Qaddafi's regime.[24] Many LIFG remnants influence and fight as part of militias engaged in the current conflict.[25] One such group is Ansar al-Sharia (ASL), a Libyan AQ affiliate, which has a strong presence in eastern Libya and Benghazi, as well as a moderate presence in Derna and Sabratha. It has been accused of perpetrating the attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, which killed Ambassador Chris Stevens in 2012.[26] The group competes with ISIL for supporters in most of Libya, but the two groups have cooperated in Benghazi against Dignity forces. Members of ASL who have not defected to ISIL are loyal to AQ leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. This has caused tensions between the two groups.[27]

Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council

The Benghazi Revolution Shura Council (BRSC) is a coalition of Islamist and jihadist fighting groups which includes Ansar al-Sharia, 17 February Brigade, Rafallah al-Shanti Brigade and Libya Shield 1. The latter three were originally MB aligned. ASL briefly broke away from the BRSC after Qatar (considered the regional patron state of the MB) requested that the BRSC support Libya's 2012 democratic elections. The groups later reunited (under Libya Dawn) after the MB militias, depleted from fighting Dignity forces, re-merged with ASL. Next to ASL, the Rafallah al-Shanti Brigade is the second largest militia in the coalition. It is believed to have been a recipient of Qatari financial and military support since 2011.[28]

Derna Mujahedeen Shura Council

The Derna Mujahedeen Shura Council (DMSC) is a coalition of Islamist militias in the eastern port city of Derna. It includes the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, which derives its name from Qaddafi's notorious Abu Salim Islamist Prison, and the Derna elements of AQ-aligned ASL. The DMSC emerged to oppose ISIL, following their appearance in Derna in 2014. In July 2015, the DMSC led the offensive that drove ISIL out of Derna after ISIL killed two of their high-ranking officials.[29] Importantly, the Abu Salim Martyr's Brigade is a vocal supporter of democracy, provided that strict sharia law is also enforced.[30]

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[24] Kamal Kutb, "سماء الأ بـ لـ يل صـ فا تـ والـ كاملة الـ.. «الأهرام ى عرب الـ» كشف أخطرت شـ بكة تـ نظيم قاعدةلـ ى فاى بـ يل," al *Ahram,* January 4, 2013, http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/25037.aspx.

[25] *European Council on Foreign Relations*, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players," accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict.

[26] Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Rise and Decline of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya" (Hudson Institute), accessed October 15, 2016, http://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya.

[27] *European Council on Foreign Relations*, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players."

[28] *Sky News Arabia*, "بـ يا لـ يـ .لـ 'شـ ج الـ' ي فـ مواجهة' فوضى الـ'," accessed October 22, 2016, http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/article/684205/بـ يا لـ يـ شـ ج الـ-مواجهة-ضى فو الـ.

[29] *BBC News*, "Guide to Key Libyan Militias," January 11, 2016, sec. Africa, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533.

[30] Nathaniel Barr and Madeleine Blackman, "A New Threat to Libya's Stability Emerges," *Jamestown*, accessed October 12, 2016, https://jamestown.org/program/a-new-threat-to-libyas-stability-emerges/.

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Benghazi Defense Brigades

The Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) is the latest coalition of jihadist militias to emerge in Benghazi. They follow Libya's Grand Mufti, Sheikh Sadiq al-Ghariani, who has called for jihadists to come together under the umbrella of the BDB.[31] The coalition includes elements of the BRSC and ASL. AQ has not explicitly revealed their ties to the BDB; however they have known ties with BRSC and ASL and have publically praised al-Ghariani's leadership. This appears to be part of a deliberate strategy to remain covert, while expanding their presence in Libya. This approach exploits the fact that local and international attention is focused on ISIL and not AQ.[32]

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

In 2014, ISIL, also known as Tandhim al-Dawla (the Organization of the State) by Libyans, announced that it was "annexing" territory representing three historical provinces in Libya (Wilayat al-Barqah in the East, Wilayat al-Tarabulus in the West and Wilayat al-Fizan in the South) as part of its mission to establish a caliphate, keeping with its "remaining and expanding" (*baqiya wa tatamaddad*) imperative.[33] The organization established a foothold in Derna in 2014. Derna has a long history of harboring Libyan jihadists during various insurgencies in the 1980s and 1990s. The rugged terrain of the Green Mountain range makes it an ideal stronghold. It also became the main source of Libyan jihadists and suicide bombers during the 2011 Libyan Civil War. In 2014, a number of Libyans who had gone to fight with ISIL in Syria returned to Derna calling themselves the Battar Group and formed the Shura Council for the Youth of Islam (SCYI). The SCYI began recruiting local militants to join ISIL in Libya. It has since established significant areas of control in Derna, Benghazi, Sirte and Sabratha, although it has recently suffered considerable setbacks in these cities.[34]

An estimated 20 percent of ISIL forces in Libya are foreign fighters. Most come from neighboring countries, such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Sudan. Infrequently, Saudi, Yemeni, Syrian and Palestinian ISIL fighters also operate in Libya.[35] ISIL has also had success recruiting militants from other fighting groups in Libya, including from AQ affiliates. ISIL's approach is simple: fight locally, institute limited governance and conduct outreach.[36]

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[31] *Libya Herald*, "Benghazi Defence Brigade Pledges Loyalty to Sheikh Ghariani," accessed October 13, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/08/16/benghazi-defence-brigade-pledges-loyalty-to-sheikh-ghariani/.
[32] Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State Details Operations against Jihadist Rivals in Derna, Libya," *The Long War Journal*, March 18, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/03/islamic-state-newsletter-summarizes-operations-against-jihadist-rivals-in-derna-libya.php.
[33] Maria Abi-Habib, "In Coastal Libya, Islamic State Prepared to Build a Nation," *Wall Street Journal*, October 10, 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-coastal-libya-islamic-state-prepared-to-build-a-nation-1476118460.
[34] *European Council on Foreign Relations*, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players."
[35] Aaron Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/01/28/the-islamic-states-model/.
[36] Ibid.

Data and Methodology

This case study is the product of an open source investigation involving secondary sources. This approach utilizes extensive qualitative description. The primary research tool employed is "thick description." Detailed descriptive analysis of this sort is ideal for developing complex, multidimensional concepts and theories.[37] Process tracing is also used. This approach likewise utilizes extensive description. It does so in order to analyze key events to enhance understanding of the precise causal process at play.[38] (Subsequent deliverables will build upon this enhanced understanding in order to allow for more rigorous testing utilizing quantitative approaches).

As already indicated, the focus of this case study is on the most recent phase of Libya's conflict, from 2014 to the present, which allows for coverage of a wide variety of conflict actors employing multiple instruments of power. On a practical level, this period reflects the most recent conflict landscape possible for this study. The situation on the ground in Libya is notoriously volatile, with coalitions constantly forming and dissolving. Therefore, this study focuses on the main belligerents, which have remained in existence throughout the period of study. These are also the most influential conflict actors.

Analysis

This section explores how the types of Gray Zone activities used and the instruments of power leveraged vary across different types of dyadic configurations of belligerent-types. By doing so, this research will help practitioners determine which instruments of power warrant careful consideration in Gray Zone conflicts, depending on the types of actors engaged. For SOF involved in these dynamics, this enhanced understanding may also help inform which types of belligerents would make effective partners and which instruments of power they should equip said partners to employ depending on the types of adversaries faced. This section proceeds by analyzing four distinct types of conflict dyads: government versus rival governments, governments versus ISIL, Dignity versus Islamists/Jihadists and Jihadists versus ISIL. The government versus rival government dyad is further deconstructed into two sub-dyads, HoR versus GNC (2014-2015) and GNA versus rival governments (2015-2016). Each dyad-type is examined with specific reference to the salient instruments of power: diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, intelligence and legal. Table 1 below summarizes the dyads.

It is critical to recognize that these dyads reflect the most macro-level conflicts occurring in Libya, where macro and micro conflict landscapes are mutually constitutive. Since Libya contains very few national (macro) actors, the vast majority of actors are local (micro) entities.[39] Macro-scale alliances are simply broad groupings of micro-scale actors, whose interests are often defined by multiple identities informed by regional or city origins, tribal alliances, or religious and ideological affiliations. It should be noted that

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[37] Michael Coppedge, "Thickening Thin Concepts and Theories: Combining Large N and Small in Comparative Politics," *Comparative Politics*, no. 4 (July 1999): 31.
[38] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS - Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011).
[39] *European Council on Foreign Relations*, "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players."

loyalties at the micro-level are often driven more by leaders' personalities as opposed to strategic objectives.[40] Furthermore, the micro-conflicts that underlie the greater contests for power are defined along overlapping fault lines (such as revolutionary, economic, religious and tribal), which are inherently unstable. Thus, the hyper-locality of agendas on the part of the individual militias backing the larger political groups mean that alliances are prone to rapid changes with minimal advance warning.

Table 1: Dyadic Configurations, Instruments of Power and Zones of Conflict[41]				
Dyad	*Actor*	*White*	*Gray*	*Black*
HoR Vs. GNC	*HoR*	Diplomatic Legal		Military
	GNC		Diplomatic Legal	Military
GNA Vs. Rival Governments	*GNA*	Diplomatic Legal Informational		Military
	Rivals		Diplomatic Informational	Military Economic
Government Vs. ISIL	*Government*	Diplomatic Informational		Military
	ISIL		Informational Financial	Military Economic
Dignity Vs. Islamists/Jihadists	*Dignity*	Diplomatic	Informational	Military
	Islamists/Jihadists	Diplomatic	Financial Informational	Military
Jihadists Vs. ISIL	*Jihadists and ISIL*		Informational Financial	Military

Government vs. Rival Government

Libya has seen a series of ineffectual transitional and interim governments compete for state power and control of resources since the election of the GNC in 2012. In the interest of providing the most relevant analysis, the government versus rival government dyad is subdivided into two sub-dyads broken out by timeframe: HoR versus GNC (May 2014 to December 2015) and GNA versus Rival Governments (2015 to present).

House of Representative vs. General National Congress (May 2014 to December 2015)

Conflict between the HoR and GNC occurs across three distinct instruments of power. This subsection proceeds by examining activities taking place in the diplomatic, military and legal instruments of power. It then briefly concludes.

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[40] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."
[41] The authors wish to thank Gia Harrigan for suggesting the inclusion of this summary table.

Diplomatic

As indicated, HoR leaders have leveraged its privileged position as the internationally recognized government to engage in diplomacy with the UAE and Egypt. In doing so, they were able to secure military assistance, logistical support and financial backing for Dignity forces due to Haftar's "pledges to cleanse Libya of Islamists, including supporters of the MB." [42] Notably, this included the UAE and Egypt conducting air strikes against Libya Dawn-aligned militias in Tripoli and al-Ghariani during 2014.[43]

For their part, the GNC alliance has not been without its own international backers. Countries such as Turkey, Sudan and Qatar have provided financial support and arms to the Tripoli-based government.[44] Consequently, the HoR has accused Qatar and Sudan of violating the UN arms embargo by supplying the GNC and their allied Libya Dawn militia faction with numerous illicit shipments of weapons.[45]

While international support for recognized state governments is normally considered White Zone activity, the involvement of international actors to support covert, proxy conflicts should be considered Gray Zone activity. The support of regional governments' for the GNC and Libya Dawn occupies the Gray Zone of diplomatic support.

Military

In May 2014, LNA forces loyal to Haftar united under the banner of "Dignity" and launched a campaign against "terrorism" in Libya.[46] Dignity found allies in militants from Zintan, a number of fighters from the Warshefana region, Sahawat (pro-Haftar gunmen) in Benghazi, the nation's Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) under the leadership of Ibrahim Jathran, and fighters loyal to influential tribal leader Ezzedine Wakwak.[47]

In response to regional tension in the western portion of Libya, and then later to Haftar's anti-Islamist operations, Islamist and militia forces aligned with the GNC coalesced into their own military bloc known as "Libya Dawn." Though the Libya Dawn coalition was largely comprised of tribal militia fighters from Misrata, it contained a diverse patchwork of "Islamist and non-Islamist militias from cities and towns across western Libya,"[48] including Warshefana fighters not aligned with Zintani militias, Berber (Amazigh) militias, elements of the MB, ASL, and loyalists of the country's Grand Mufti Sheikh Sadiq al-Ghariani.[49]

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[42] Ibid.; Engle, "Defeating the Islamic State in Sirte;" *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."
[43] *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."
[44] Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention."
[45] *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."
[46] Though this operation predates the formal electoral process that led to the formation of the HoR, Haftar's symbiotic relationship with the legislative body from its inception through to the present clearly marks the beginning of the Dignity and HoR faction's use of the military lever of power within the context of Libya's Gray Zone conflict.
[47] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy;" Fitzgerald, "Mapping Libya's Factions."
[48] Fitzgerald, "Mapping Libya's Factions."
[49] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy;" *Eye on ISIS in Libya,* "ISIS in Action," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/action-8-september-2014/.

Under Haftar's command, Dignity and aligned forces began a multi-pronged attack against Islamist militants in the country's eastern region. Dignity faced off against the nascent Libyan branch of ISIL in Derna and began another offensive to retake Benghazi from the Libya Dawn-aligned BRSC. Despite Haftar's expertise and external support, the battles for both cities dragged into the next year; Derna was liberated from ISIL in June 2015 and the Islamist factions in Benghazi continued to hold the city through the last months of 2015 (for more detail on anti-Islamist dimensions of the conflict, see *Dignity versus Islamists/Jihadists*, below).[50]

By July 2014, however, the political situation had deteriorated following the previous month's election (see *Legal*, below) and the tension between the Dignity and Libya Dawn camps erupted into civil war. Libya Dawn forces in the capital launched a siege of the international airport in Tripoli and clashed with Zintan militia forces aligned with Dignity.[51] After a month of fierce battles, the Libya Dawn coalition wrested control of the capital city from Dignity forces.[52] Remnants of the GNC declared themselves to be the "real" government of Libya and established Tripoli as their headquarters, in opposition to the internationally recognized HoR in Tobruk. This stalemate of government versus rival government remained in place until December 2015.

Insofar as both sides relied on the extensive, overt use of kinetic military operations, competition utilizing the military instrument of power is best classified as Black.

Legal
The military dimension of the Libyan conflict embodied by Dignity versus Libya Dawn forces coincided with the run up to scheduled elections for the legislature. The representatives comprising this new parliamentary body - slated to replace the GNC – were selected by Libyans on June 25, 2014. As already noted, and despite international recognition, the elections were viewed as illegitimate by many Libyans.[53] Tensions compounded when the HoR moved the new parliament to the eastern city of Tobruk.[54] Competition between the HoR and the GNC for domestic recognition and legitimacy ensued. Each government appointed its own prime minister, cabinet and parallel administrations.

The election and international recognition of the HoR clearly occurred within accepted legal frameworks. It is therefore best classified as White. However, in November 2014, Libya's Supreme Court muddied the waters by invalidating the constitutional amendment that had set the stage for the June 25th elections.[55] The HoR rejected this ruling, while the GNC "reconvened [again] claiming to be the legitimate legislature

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[50] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy;" *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "February 17, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/action-17-february-2016/; Fitzgerald, "Mapping Libya's Factions;" Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention."
[51] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."
[52] Fitzgerald, "Mapping Libya's Factions."
[53] *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."
[54] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."
[55] Fitzgerald, "Mapping Liby's Factions."

and demanded the dissolution of the House of Representatives."[56] Thus, the revival of the GNC is best classified as Gray, as it challenged the political legitimacy of the elected governing body.

Dyad Summary

Between May 2014 and December 2015, the rival governments of the HoR and the GNC utilized military, legal and diplomatic instruments of power to compete for legitimacy as Libya's national government. The rival governments engaged each other across the spectrum of White, Gray and Black Zone activities, including armed conflict between aligned militias, electoral competition, and covert arms deals with international actors.

Government of National Accord vs. Rival Governments (2015 to present)

Conflict between the GNA and rivals from both of the previous governments occurs across five distinct instruments of power. This subsection proceeds by examining activities taking place in each of the pertinent instruments of power, while attempting to classify them as White, Gray or Black.

Diplomatic

Diplomatic efforts involving both the GNA and its rivals can be subdivided into two distinct categories. The first type includes negotiations occurring between the GNA and the two rival governments (and also involving the UN, which hosts negotiations and act as a guarantor).

The GNA exists as a product of 14 months of diplomatic negotiations brokered first by UN Special Envoy Bernardino León and then by his successor, Martin Kobler. The LPA was signed on December 17, 2015, in Skhirat, Morocco by members of the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue, including members from both rival governments along with other Libyan stakeholders. While it was originally intended that both parliaments would approve the LPA, this did not happen. Instead, the UN gathered members of the dialogue to sign its draft of the agreement without the official support of either parliament. This has led to a host of problems, since the LPA requires that the HoR endorse the GNA and its political program.[57] The main obstacle to endorsing the GNA has been the influence of Haftar and pro-Haftar HoR leaders. They refuse to endorse any government that removes Haftar as commander of Libya's armed forces. The HoR only partially approved the LPA on January 28, 2016, when a large majority voted in favor of the agreement, contingent on the removal of an article calling for command of the military and other key institutions to shift to PC-appointed leaders.[58] HoR leader Agila Saleh, who has strong ties to Haftar, has refused to hand over leadership of the Supreme Command to the PC. Haftar's refusal to join the unity government, due to its affiliation with rival militias he claims are "outside of the law," has undermined the GNA's ability to gain political acceptance.[59]

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[56] *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."

[57] Emadeddin Muntasser, "The Coming Fall of Libya's GNA," *Foreign Affairs*, September 6, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2016-09-06/coming-fall-libyas-gna.

[58] *Council on Foreign Relations*, "The Big Lie about the Libyan War," accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.cfr.org/libya/big-lie-libyan-war/p37688.

[59] Elif Rahemtulla, "UN 'game Changing' arms Crackdown in Libya" *Global Risk Insights*, June 29, 2016, http://globalriskinsights.com/2016/06/un-game-changing-arm-embargo-libya/.

Al-Sarraj's persistent negotiations with HoR leaders have had little impact. While they have accepted the GNA in principle, they have twice refused to endorse any of his proposed cabinet appointments. To date, HoR leaders have blocked a required procedural vote and constitutional amendment process to endorse the GNA, despite support from over 100 HoR members.[60] In July 2016, four HoR-aligned ministers resigned in protest on the grounds that their western opponents were unfairly dominating the council.[61] The situation appears to have reached a stalemate, with the GNA remaining the internationally recognized government, but lacking the power to control Libya's political, economic or military apparatuses.[62] These types of diplomatic efforts are best classified as occurring in the White Zone, as negotiations between competing elements brokered by international organizations are de-escalatory in nature.

The second type of diplomatic activities involves engagement with foreign states that are (at least tangentially) involved in the conflict. For the GNA, this has largely involved engaging the international community in negotiations to secure international support, in addition to negotiating sanctions against GNA opponents to try to establish its authority in Libya.[63] The GNA is the only internationally recognized government and is thus the sole legitimate recipient of international security assistance.[64] It enjoys financial assistance and security cooperation from the United States and European Union, which have shared interests in protecting Libya's oil infrastructure and are concerned that continued instability in Libya will enable the spread of ISIL throughout the region.[65] The United States and counter-ISIL coalition forces have provided direct military support to the GNA against ISIL. The UN agreed to partially lift its arms embargo on Libya in response to al-Sarraj's appeals for assistance in training and equipping counter-ISIL forces in Sirte.

Al-Sarraj was appointed by the UN to head the PC and has benefited from its continued support against rival governments and LPA spoilers. He has negotiated the imposition of U.S. and E.U. sanctions on eastern Libyan leaders for obstruction of the LPA amidst unfolding competition over military leadership and control of energy resources.[66] It is worth noting that international recognition and support has done little to improve the GNA's legitimacy inside Libya and has in certain cases been damaging by playing into the hands of rivals who argue that it is a Western puppet-government.[67]

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[60] Blanchard, "Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy."
[61] Muntasser, "The Coming Fall of Libya's GNA."
[62] Moutaz Mathi, "Less than Half of PC Meet to Debate GNA No. 3," *Libya Herald*, August 29, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/08/29/less-than-half-of-pc-meet-to-debate-gna-no-3/.
[63] Patrick Wintour, "World Powers Prepared to Arm UN-Backed Libyan Government," *The Guardian*, May 16, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/16/world-powers-prepared-arm-un-backed-libyan-government.
[64] *U.S. Department of State*, *Bureau of Public Affairs,* "Joint Communique on Libya," (September 22, 2016), http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/09/262285.htm.
[65] Wintour, "World Powers Prepared to Arm UN-Backed Libyan Government."
[66] Muntasser, "The Coming Fall of Libya's GNA."
[67] Ibid.

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For Haftar, international legitimacy and support is of supreme importance. His ally and advocate, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has taken up his cause and has appealed to international leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin to back Haftar as the head of Libya's military. Haftar has also directly appealed to Russia to end its arms embargo on Libya and requested assistance in the form of arms, military equipment and other aid for Dignity forces.[68] Circumstantial evidence suggests that Haftar has been receiving at least limited covert military support from British, French and U.S. forces in his campaign against militias in Benghazi.[69]

The GNA's use of diplomatic engagement to secure security assistance, military and financial support, and to bolster its position as the legitimate governing authority should be regarded as White Zone activity, as states typically cooperate on security matters and counter-insurgency operations. On the other hand, diplomatic engagement to secure international support and assistance on the part of rival governments should be classified as Gray, as the intention is to undermine the authority of the recognized government.

Informational
In addition to diplomacy, both sides have sought to use information engagement to their advantage. During the Qaddafi era, freedom of speech and the press were severely restricted. After these restrictions were removed, digital media rose in popularity, as did the use and influence of social media (particularly Facebook).[70] Popular news outlets are widely followed on Facebook, which serves as a force multiplier in influencing public opinion as stories become reposted and circulated on social media.[71] Problematically, most of what passes for news is political propaganda. Absent professional news outlets, outrageous gossip is often regarded as fact.[72] In Libya, the information environment is as outrageous as it is influential.

The GNA has an Arabic language website that regularly publishes stories on the efforts of the Presidential Council to engage in fair negotiations to reach a compromise with anti-GNA elements. Reports always emphasize al-Sarraj's neutrality in negotiations, highlighting compromises made on both sides.[73] The GNA also has official Facebook and Twitter pages, which highlight meetings with important Libyan and international leaders.

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[68] *Libyan Express*, "Haftar Asks Russia to Lift Arms Embargo and to Apply the Syrian Scenario in Libya," September 28, 2016, http://www.libyanexpress.com/haftar-asks-russia-to-lift-arms-embargo-and-to-apply-the-syrian-scenario-in-libya/.
[69] *Al Jazeera English*, "Libya: Leaked Tapes Suggest West Supports Haftar," August 9, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/leaked-tapes-expose-western-support-libyan-general-160708182646443.html; Karim El-Bar, "REVEALED: Leaked Tapes Expose Western Support for Renegade Libyan General," *Middle East Eye*, July 8, 2016, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/revealed-leaked-tapes-expose-western-support-renegade-libyan-general-185825787.
[70] *BBC Monitoring*, "Social Media on the Rise in War-Torn Libya," accessed October 11, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/social-media-on-the-rise-in-conflicted-libya.
[71] Based on author's observation of Libyan social media
[72] Jon Lee Anderson, "Libya's New Strongman," *The New Yorker*, accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling.
[73] "إطلاق عاليات في ذكرى سادس الملد ضد باطل الجيش ليبي الد لحتار شعار, 'شي جيبي واحد'," *Government of National Accord*, *Government of National Accord Webpage*, accessed October 19, 2016, http://www.pm.gov.ly/.

A scandal recently broke when pro-GNA elements within the HoR released a report implicating HoR Chief of Staff Abdullah al-Masri (and by extension President Saleh) in corruption and financial mismanagement. Though the HoR has declared the report false, it was still circulated widely on social media and has had significant ramifications, fueling claims that the HoR is filled with corrupt Qaddafi-era remnants seeking to re-establish control of Libya.[74]

Pro-Haftar elements have waged a moderately successful PR campaign that paints the GNA as a neo-imperialist Western puppet government. They accuse Qatar, Turkey and Sudan of supporting MB and other Islamist elements, as well as non-Islamist rivals of the HoR in the West in order to expand their influence in the region. Haftar's Facebook account, which is widely followed, regularly posts articles that seek to discredit the legitimacy of the GNA, al-Sarraj and the PC ministers by exposing so-called Western and pro-Islamist biases.[75]

Similarly, Haftar's opponents in the GNA have accused him of being a puppet of international forces, pointing to his strong ties to Egypt and the UAE. They also point to León's links to the UAE (he was negotiating a lucrative job contract with the UAE government) as evidence of a covert plot by foreign powers.[76]

In general, GNA information campaigns are overt and do not attempt to incite violence. Therefore, they are best classified as White. Rival governments utilizing information engagement in a more aggressive manner, to undermine support for the internationally recognized GNA, are engaged in Gray activity.

Military
While the GNA government has not carried out military attacks against either rival government, both of its rivals have behaved aggressively towards GNA-aligned forces.

On September 11, 2016, Haftar's forces launched Operation Sudden Lightening, seizing control of Libya's oil crescent from the PFG. It was the first time the LNA has directly engaged in military aggression against the UN-backed government since it took over Tripoli in March. Notably, Western countries including the United States and United Kingdom were planning to train the PFG to become a more effective fighting force.[77] The seizure of the oil ports undercut GNA's authority by demonstrating their inability to control national resources and economic institutions.[78]

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[74] *Libya Herald*, "Corruption Allegations Rock HoR," accessed October 15, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/10/12/corruption-allegations-rock-hor/.
[75] *Libya Herald*, "GNA Launches Official Logo and Facebook Page Today," accessed October 19, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/01/07/gna-launches-official-logo-and-facebook-page-today/.
[76] David D. Kirkpatrick, "Leaked Emirati Emails Could Threaten Peace Talks in Libya," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/world/middleeast/leaked-emirati-emails-could-threaten-peace-talks-in-libya.html; Giorgio Cafiero, "The UAE and Qatar Wage a Proxy War in Libya," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/giorgio-cafiero/the-uae-and-qatar-wage-a-_b_8801602.html.
[77] Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention."
[78] *Middle East Briefing*, "General Haftar's Moves to Help Libya Boosts Its Oil Production," accessed October 12, 2016, http://mebriefing.com/?p=2548.

On October 15, 2016, militias loyal to Ghwell, seized control of the State Council assembly, various other government facilities and a TV station in Tripoli. During the operation, Ghwell announced a "historical initiative to rescue Libya" and declared the GNA illegitimate.[79]

The aforementioned operations are emblematic of the rival governments' use of the military instrument of power in this dyad. These activities are largely Black, involving the use of overt, kinetic operations. However, it is worth noting that certain activities, such as Ghwell's operation approximating a coup against the internationally recognized government, violate international norms – a hallmark of the Gray Zone.

Economic
Competition for control of oil production, pipelines and terminals has been a central struggle for competing factions in Libya since 2011. Libya has the largest proven oil reserves on the African continent, estimated at 48 billion barrels. Oil production accounts for 95 percent of the country's economy.[80] To this end, Haftar has been aggressively seeking economic leverage to improve his political status and negotiating power at the expense of the GNA's authority. Operation Sudden Lightening brought an end to a two-year blockade on international oil exports from the Ras Lanuf, Sidra and Zueitina ports.[81] The ports had been closed to protect them from further terrorist attacks, which had previously caused severe damage to infrastructure and oil reserves. Haftar stated that all oil revenue will be channeled through the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya and the National Oil Corporation, both of which are still under the control of al-Sarraj and the PC. Haftar's move to control the ports, and by extension the oil economy, gives him and his HoR allies a great deal of leverage in political negotiations. Opening the oil ports just as his opponents are making progress against ISIL, will allow him to take credit for bringing prosperity and security back to Libya. He has also gained a great deal of international leverage.

Haftar's seizure of the ports from the GNA serves to undermine its authority over key institutions and weakens its negotiating position. It does so by depriving the internationally recognized government of its most important economic resource. This action therefore rises to the level of economic warfare and is best classified as Black.

Financial
The GNA receives financial support from the United States, amounting to at least $56 million in 2016.[82] This is classified as White Zone activity. It is unclear exactly how much international financial support is received by rival governments, although both sides have ties to outside states that directly or indirectly

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[79] Stephen, "Libya Coup Attempt as Tripoli Militias Seek to Topple UN-Backed Government."
[80] Jason Pack, "Controlling Libya's Wealth: Hifter's Long Game," *Al-Monitor*, September 29, 2016, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/09/libya-oil-wealth-following-money-hifter.html.
[81] Ibid.
[82] *Libya Herald*, "US Ups Financial Support for GNA," accessed October 19, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/06/17/us-ups-financial-support-for-gna/.

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provide financial assistance. The financing of non-state actors at the expense of the legitimate state authority is best classified as Gray.[83]

Legal

Al-Sarraj has leveraged the GNA's legal status to negotiate an exemption from the UN arms embargo on Libya, under which Haftar's forces are still barred. As noted above, the United States and European Union have agreed to impose sanctions on LPA spoilers in Tobruk amidst unfolding competition over military leadership and control of oil resources.[84] Both the imposition of the initial sanctions regime and the lifting of the embargo for internationally recognized forces are normal, White Zone activities for the international community. Similarly, the efforts of al-Sarraj, as a representative of the GNA, to negotiate an exemption are also White.

Dyad Summary

The conflict between the GNA and its rivals spans six instruments of power. While the diplomatic, military and economic instruments are most salient, activities are also occurring within the informational, financial and legal instruments. The GNA is primarily involved in White Zone diplomatic and legal activity typical of internationally recognized governments, as well as de-escalatory, White Zone information engagement. Both rival governments have engaged in Black Zone military activity and Gray Zone financial pursuits. The HoR, in particular, has engaged in Black Zone economic behavior, as well as Gray Zone information engagement, which is escalatory in nature.

Governments vs. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

While other sections illustrate competition between the GNA, HoR and GNC, this section endeavors to examine conflict between the governments and ISIL. Despite infighting, elements of all three governments have cooperated against ISIL forces in Libya, particularly in Derna and Sirte. Conflict between the governments and ISIL occurs across five instruments of power: diplomatic, informational, military, economic and financial. This subsection proceeds by examining activities taking place in each of the pertinent instruments of power. It also classify these actions as White, Gray or Black.

Diplomatic

The GNA has engaged in international diplomatic activity, negotiating security assistance and direct military support from the United States and the counter-ISIL coalition. Indeed, U.S. airstrikes in support

[83] Cafiero, "The UAE and Qatar Wage a Proxy War in Libya;" Chris Stephen, "War in Libya - the Guardian Briefing," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/-sp-briefing-war-in-libya; David D. Kirkpatrick, "Qatar's Support of Islamists Alienates Allies Near and Far," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/08/world/middleeast/qatars-support-of-extremists-alienates-allies-near-and-far.html.
[84] *U.S. Department of State*, Bureau of Public Affairs, "Statement on Libya," March 13, 2016, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/03/254641.htm.

of GNA-allied forces fighting ISIL in Sirte began in August 2016.[85] These forces have also cooperated with U.S. SOF sent to coordinate air strikes, gather intelligence, and train and equip local forces.[86]

Haftar has skillfully endeavored to use the armed conflict with ISIL to his advantage. Keenly aware of the importance the West places on containing and defeating ISIL, Haftar has sought to cast himself as the group's primary foe in Libya in order to have the international arms embargo lifted.[87] If the embargo were to be lifted, Haftar would also be able to use any arms his forces receive against his GNC and Libya Dawn rivals, an enemy that he views as far more pressing than ISIL.[88]

These activities are mostly occurring in the White Zone, as governments routinely engage in bi- and multi-lateral security and counter-insurgency cooperation. However, certain actions are better classified as Gray. This is the case as Libya's situation is unique given the role of VNSAs in the Libyan counter-ISIL coalition. For example, Haftar's counter-ISIL activities also aim to obtain weapons for use against pro-government forces and to achieve international recognition and legitimacy.

Informational
Both sides have used information engagement to their advantage. The governments have, for the most part, done their best to counter ISIL's potent propaganda to discourage potential recruits from joining the organization. The GNA's strategy of broadcasting the success of its allied forces in Sirte has damaged the credibility of ISIL's "remaining and expanding" narrative. The media coverage of the human rights abuses, deprivation and brutality under ISIL-occupied areas has further helped the GNA gain external support from Western nations.

More controversially, the GNC-Libya Dawn coalition has used social media platforms to spread the rumor that "former regime members are fighting on the side of ISIL in and around Sirte," this simultaneously discredits ISIL and the GNC's political rivals.[89]

ISIL has used digital media to encourage supporters worldwide, recruit local and foreign fighters, and discredit its enemies. It is notorious for its superior use of information engagement in the Gray Zone, as it

[85] Holly Yan, "US Launches Airstrikes on ISIS Targets in Libya," *CNN*, accessed October 9, 2016, http://www.cnn.com/2016/08/01/politics/us-libya-isis-airstrikes/index.html.
[86] *Al Jazeera English*, "Libya to Be Military Equipped in Fight against ISIL," accessed October 17, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/libya-world-powers-ready-arm-unity-government-160516145308214.html; *Washington Post*, "U.S. Special Operations Troops Aiding Libyan Forces in Major Battle against Islamic State," accessed October 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/08/09/u-s-special-operations-forces-are-providing-direct-on-the-ground-support-for-the-first-time-in-libya/.
[87] *House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee,* "Libya, Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK's Future Policy Options," September 14, 2016, Third report of session 2016-17, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaff/119/119.pdf
[88] *Al Jazeera*, "Libya to Be Military Equipped in Fight against ISIL," May 17, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/05/libya-world-powers-ready-arm-unity-government-160516145308214.html; Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention."
[89] *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, "The Islamic State's Strategy in Libya," March 25, 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=59488.

attempts to incite violence against the governments. Its sophisticated al-Hayat Media Center produces material in English, German, Russian and French.[90]. The group has its own news agency (al-Amaq), official radio station (al-Bayan) and digital magazine (Dabiq). It has also been developing and testing various mobile apps.[91] Al-Hayat produces audio and video content that is particularly effective at highlighting its successes.[92] Moreover, ISIL has made extensive use of social media sites like Twitter, though these platforms have started to pull down pro-ISIL accounts.[93]

ISIL has established a core of mutually reinforcing narratives that simultaneously target local and global audiences, including prospective foreign fighters, political Islamists, AQ militants and supporters, government and international counter-ISIL forces. These narratives work in support of three key arguments for ISIL's authority over its opponents, including the government. Specifically, 1) ISIL has successfully restored the caliphate under sharia law, 2) this makes the ISIL caliphate the only authentic Islamic state in existence, and thus 3) all other governments attempting to operate in ISIL-occupied territories are illegitimate.[94]

ISIL has heavily employed its "illegitimacy of political Islamists" narrative, which is a direct affront to MB elements of the GNA/GNC in particular, to detract support from the governments.[95] ISIL further attempted to delegitimize Libya Dawn by framing them as a "Western proxy" force, hoping to persuade fighters aligned with the coalition to defect. For example, an ISIL leader in Sirte has directly appealed "to the youth of Misrata to sacrifice themselves for God and not for the sake of democracy by supporting the Libyan Dawn forces."[96]

In Libya, the dissemination of propaganda reinforcing a "winners' message" serves a dual (local and global) purpose. This narrative works in support of ISIL's "remaining and expanding" existential imperative, as its legitimacy and authority are contingent upon its ability to continue "winning" against all others. Thus, ISIL's propaganda must demonstrate that in Libya and elsewhere, it is growing in strength and influence.[97] To this end the English-language version of Dabiq devoted an entire issue entitled "Remaining and Expanding" to outlining why the caliphate's expansion into Libya and other new

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[90] *Jihadology*, "Al-Ḥayāt Media Center," accessed October 24, 2016, http://jihadology.net/category/al-%E1%B8%A5ayat-media-center/.
[91] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "March 22, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/action-22-march-2016/.
[92] Olivia Becker, "ISIS Has a Really Slick and Sophisticated Media Department," *VICE News*, August 12, 2014, https://news.vice.com/article/isis-has-a-really-slick-and-sophisticated-media-department.
[93] Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Nathaniel Barr, and Bridget Moreng, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts," *War on the Rocks*, April 28, 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/how-islamic-states-propaganda-feeds-into-its-global-expansion-efforts/.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Aaron Y. Zelin, "New Statement from Al-Murābiṭūn: 'Persistence, Persistence,'" *Jihadology*, July 23, 2016, http://jihadology.net/2016/07/23/new-statement-from-al-murabi%e1%b9%adun-persistence-persistence/. *Dabiq*, "The Murtadd Brotherhood," accessed October 18, 2016, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/the-islamic-state-22dacc84biq-magazine-1422.pdf.
[96] Kamal Qsiyer, "The Islamic State (IS) in Libya: Expansion by Political Crisis," *Al Jazeera,* May 23, 2015, http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2015/06/201562310837854715.html.
[97] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts."

territories is irrevocable proof of its strength and legitimacy.[98] To this end, ISIL employs "instrumental brutality" to immediately demonstrate its strength and ruthlessness to supporters and enemies alike.[99] For example, ISIL's beheading of the 21 Egyptian Christians kidnapped in Libya served to simultaneously announce its arrival and show off its strength in a new theater.[100]

Furthermore, ISIL has been successful in translating the global appeal of its narratives to local contexts, exploiting pre-existing political divisions, conflicts and grievances. For example, ISIL has capitalized on the tensions between the Misrata and tribal groups, releasing photos showing Libyan tribal elders from Warfalla, Qadhadhifa and Awlad Sulayman pledging allegiance to ISIL.[101] It has also deployed significant propaganda messaging to target individuals disillusioned with both rival governments, "playing these opposing coalitions against one another…denounce[ing] both the Tripoli and Tobruk-based post-revolutionary governments as illegitimate."[102]

Libya also exemplifies another one of ISIL's core propaganda narratives of the caliphate as the only place where Muslims can live in peace and harmony. Such a narrative is especially effective when communicating ISIL's influence in Libya, where an oversimplified Islamist versus anti-Islamist narrative of the war has become popularized. Videos of religious police (*Hisba*) patrolling the streets in Sirte, providing law and order to areas which appear calm, peaceful and orderly, seek to create the illusion of security and stability in contrast to the violence and chaos that has subsumed much of the country.[103] The reality is that most of the residents in Sirte had fled, leaving ISIL militants to occupy their homes and towns.

Both sides have used information engagement to their advantage. The GNA's information campaigns, which do not attempt to incite violence and are de-escalatory in nature, are White. The GNC-Libya Dawn coalition's counter-ISIL messaging should be considered Gray, as its dual intention is to simultaneously discredit ISIL, and the HoR and Dignity. ISIL's propaganda machine should be considered one of its most potent weapons in the Gray Zone. Indeed, experts believe that ISIL is winning the propaganda war.[104]

Military
Between the formation of ISIL's Libyan branch in November 2014 and December 2015, HoR and Dignity forces have battled the group in the eastern portion of the country. Dignity and LNA fighters repeatedly clashed with ISIL militants in the city of Derna throughout the end of 2014 and into mid-2015. Egypt took

[98] *War on the Rocks*, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts," April 28, 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/how-islamic-states-propaganda-feeds-into-its-global-expansion-efforts/.
[99] *BBC News,* "Guide to Key Libyan Militias," January 11, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533.
[100] *BBC News*, "Islamic State: Egyptian Christians Held in Libya 'Killed,'" February 15, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-31481797.
[101] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "May 9, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/action-9-may-2016/; *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "May 30, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/action-30-may-2016/.
[102] *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, "The Islamic State's Strategy in Libya," March 25, 2015, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=59488.
[103] Brendan Koerner, "Why ISIS Is Winning the Social Media War—And How to Fight Back," *WIRED*, April 2016, https://www.wired.com/2016/03/isis-winning-social-media-war-heres-beat/.
[104] Ibid.

its support for the HoR and Dignity's battle against ISIL a step further in February of 2015 and launched airstrikes in Derna, following ISIL's release of a video showing the brutal beheadings of a group of Egyptian Coptic Christians kidnapped during the previous two months.[105] Finally, in early June 2015, an alliance of strange bedfellows briefly emerged when the DMSC joined with Haftar's Dignity and LNA forces to evict ISIL from the city, after two of its leaders were killed by ISIL.[106]

The military dimension of the conflict between ISIL and the Libya Dawn forces aligned with the GNC centered primarily on the coastal cities of Sirte and Misrata. In May of 2015, ISIL militants achieved a significant victory when it seized control of Sirte from the GNC and Libya Dawn coalition ally Battalion 166.[107] The capture of Sirte was not only a territorial loss for the Tripoli-based government, but also a strategic and economic blow; the city "is one of the major points of interest in the 'oil crescent' region" along the Libyan coast.[108]

GNA-allied forces involved in the counter-ISIL offensive report to a joint military command center set up by the GNA in Misrata. However, each militia also takes direct orders from its own commander. Despite this, coordination between the militias in Sirte appears to have been successful.[109] The main Misratan force, Bunyan Marsus, as well as the PFG have been involved in particularly heavy fighting against ISIL. They have mostly employed conventional tactics such as air strikes, blockades and ground assaults. They have also used reconnaissance to target ISIL troop movements from the air.[110]

ISIL has employed both conventional and unconventional weapons in its military endeavors. Qaddafi's huge cache of weapons was not secured during the Libyan Civil War of 2011, and much of it has ended up on the black market where ISIL and other jihadist groups (see *Dignity vs. Islamists/Jihadists)* have easy access.[111] ISIL has handheld rocket launchers and sniper weapons, and has set up bomb factories to produce bombs and IEDs.[112] It has frequently used suicide bombers and suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs) against GNA-allied forces, which often result in large numbers of casualties and injuries. SVBIEDs have proven to be the most lethal of ISIL's tactics. In February 2016, after declaring a state of emergency in Sirte, ISIL forces resorted to digging tunnels and trenches around the city to defend its positions.[113]

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[105] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "February 17, 2016;" *Human Rights Watch*, "Libya."
[106] Maria Abi-Habib, "Militias Corner Islamic State in Libyan City," *Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 2016, sec. Page One, http://www.wsj.com/articles/militias-corner-islamic-state-in-libyan-city-1472757103; Mohamed Eljarh, "A Victory Over the Islamic State in Libya," *Foreign Policy*, May 24, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/24/a-victory-over-the-islamic-state-in-libya/.
[107] Qsiyer, "The Islamic State (IS) in Libya."
[108] Ibid.
[109] *ENCA*, "Who Is Fighting against IS in Libya's Sirte?," June 11, 2016, https://www.enca.com/africa/who-is-fighting-against-is-in-libyas-sirte.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Christopher Occhicone, "The Online Trade of Light Weapons in Libya," *Geneva: Small Arms Survey*, April 2016. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/R-SANA/SANA-Dispatch6-Online-trade.pdf.
[112] Yan, "US Launches Airstrikes on ISIS Targets in Libya."
[113] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "February 17, 2016."

ISIL also employs a mix of conventional and unconventional tactics. In particular, it has relied on terrorizing the population into submission with spectacular shows of extreme violence and brutality. In areas where it is establishing a foothold, ISIL's methods of population control have been particularly barbaric. Its opponents in Sirte and Derna have typically gone into hiding or fled, terrorized by a string of slayings aimed at silencing them.[114] For example, in May 2016 after ISIL launched a surprise attack to expand its territory to the southwest of Sirte, it immediately employed "instrumental brutality" such as public executions, targeting and arresting women in "witch hunts," burning of commodities, setting up Sharia courts, forcing regular army and police officers to declare their allegiance to ISIL, and setting up checkpoints manned by foreign fighters to find and arrest opponents.[115] It carries out public executions of dissenters accused of working with the "apostate Libyan governments" in front of forcibly gathered crowds and publishes an ever-growing list of "convicts" to be executed or punished every Friday. It has publicized images of beheadings, floggings and amputations, including the beheading and shooting of at least 49 Egyptian and Ethiopian Coptic Christians.[116] It has committed summary executions of captured fighters and abducted civilians, including foreigners.[117]

ISIL forces have also carried out indiscriminate suicide attacks against the civilian populations of Libya, including the January bombing of a Tripoli hotel that killed eight civilians. In August 2016, after an attempt by GNA-allied forces to push ISIL forces out of Sirte, militants retaliated by shelling a residential neighborhood and forcing civilians to flee, randomly destroying homes of families they claimed were traitors. It seems that ISIL increases its large-scale violence against the civilian population when it is losing territory, in an attempt to discourage its opponents from intensifying their efforts against the group.[118] This is consistent with scholarly research, which shows that in irregular civil wars, civilian victimization increases in contested areas relative to areas firmly under rebel (or state) control.[119]

While the exact numbers of foreign fighters is unknown, it appears substantial. Some locals suggest that the depopulation of the city is part of a conscious strategy to make room for foreign fighters.[120] By May, more than 70 percent of the city's residents are estimated to have fled. ISIL currently occupies the homes and properties of those who fled Sirte. ISIL has also called for all residents living in government-owned properties to immediately pay their debts or face expulsion from their homes. The presence of some remaining civilians has nevertheless made international airstrikes and attacks by the local anti-ISIL coalition more difficult by increasing the risk of collateral damage.[121] ISIL has also used coercive tactics designed to discourage its opponents from attacking. These include the use of human shields, hostage taking and kidnapping foreigners who are often featured in "warning" videos.[122]

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[114] *The World Post*, "How a Libyan City Joined the Islamic State Group," November 9, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20141109/ml--libya-islamic-state/?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=world.
[115] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "Action — 9 May 2016;" *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "Action — 30 May 2016."
[116] Jebnoun, "Beyond the Mayhem."
[117] *Amnesty International*, "Libya 2015/2016."
[118] Ibid.
[119] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[120] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "Action — 9 May 2016."
[121] Occhicone, "Libya 2015."
[122] *Amnesty International*, "Libya 2015/2016."

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ISIL has also aggressively targeted Libya's oil infrastructure (see *economic*, below) using suicide bombers, harassment and interdiction fires and SVBIEDs. It launched a seaborne offensive on the Ras Lanuf oil port that was repelled by PFG forces, who intercepted three ISIL boats and destroyed two more. One of the suicide bombers was a 15 year old Tripoli teenager.[123]

The U.S. airstrikes that have supported the GNA-allied militia efforts have further eroded ISIL's control of Sirte. The group has been evicted from all but a few neighborhoods, and currently has its back to the wall, as counter-ISIL forces have pushed remaining militants to the coastline. The situation is still unfolding and there is a distinct possibility that militants who have abandoned Sirte will attempt to take hold of other Libyan cities and towns in the future and with help from incoming foreign fighters.

Both sides have engaged open violence that can be classified as Black Zone military activity. ISIL has engaged in Black Zone armed violence to control territory and resources and has also employed indirect Gray Zone tactics, such as intimidating local populations as a means of gaining control of an area without direct fighting, the use of human shields and other wanton violations of international norms.

Economic

ISIL has engaged in economic sabotage by attempting to take control of oil ports and damage oil infrastructure. The group has released statements outlining its strategy to deny oil revenues to the government and hurt Western oil consumers.[124] ISIL has launched several attacks against oil facilities in Libya since January 2015, including in Sidrah and Ras Lanuf. In January 2016, ISIL waged a three-day assault on ports in Libya's oil crescent, destroying over a billion dollars' worth of infrastructure and stored oil.[125] It severely damaged five oil storage tanks, and the ensuing fire burned over four million barrels of crude oil, ruining three storage tanks completely. It also launched a seaborne attack intended to disorient PFG forces, cripple the port's infrastructure, capture headlines and further demoralize the population.[126]

Misratan militias faced an economic imperative to confront ISIL and have launched a counter-ISIL campaign with the GNA in order to cut off ISIL's access to key trade routes. Misrata is a commercial and military powerhouse, and by seizing the checkpoint in Sirte, ISIL had cut off the port city's commercial lifeline to the south. The Misrata defeated ISIL, taking back control of trade routes and damaging ISIL's economic position in the west. Had ISIL not faced significant opposition in taking the ports, it would have benefited greatly from control of a critical trade route.[127]

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[123] *Libya Analysis*, "ISIS and Oil — Targeting Infrastructure to Weaken the GNA," May 17, 2016, http://www.libya-analysis.com/isis-and-oil-targeting-infrastructure-to-weaken-the-gna/.

[124] Ibid.; Lydia Sizer and Jason Pack, "ISIS Fuels Discord in Libya," *Foreign Affairs*, May 17, 2016, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2016-05-17/isis-fuels-discord-libya.

[125] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "January 12, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/isis-in-action-12-jan-2016/.

[126] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "January 27, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/isis-in-action-jan-27-2016/.

[127] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "May 30, 2016."

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ISIL's attacks on Libya's oil economy should be classified as Black Zone economic warfare, as they attempted to deprive the government of its main source of revenue. Armed competition for control of trade routes by GNA allied forces and ISIL should also be considered Black, as this too is representative of economic warfare.

Financial
ISIL's methods of governance have required that they levy a tax on occupied territories, which has generated significant resources for the group. Furthermore, the forced repayment of all debt and the seizure of property have contributed to the group's immense assets.[128] This can be classified as Gray Zone activity, which falls short of overt competition but nonetheless uses coercion and force to bolster ISIL's position.

Dyad Summary
This dyad has largely involved the informational, military and economic instruments of power. The Governments are primarily engaged in counter-ISIL diplomatic and informational activities which are de-escalatory in nature and Black Zone military and economic activity. ISIL is engaged in Gray Zone information engagement, which constitutes its most potent weapons. It has also taken Black Zone military and economic action, in addition to Gray Zone financial competition.

Dignity vs. Islamists/Jihadists
The grouping of Islamists and jihadists in this dyad are united by their shared opposition to Haftar and his anti-Islamist forces. Haftar and Dignity have controversially labeled all Islamists (and all of Haftar's other enemies) as terrorists. He frames Dignity as a counter-terrorism operation, in an attempt to cast his fight as part of the "Global War on Terror."

Diplomatic
Both sides have engaged in negotiations with outside states. As noted, Haftar has negotiated with foreign states that are directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. He has known ties to Egypt and the UAE, which have provided direct military support and security cooperation. Egypt has provided Dignity forces with training and equipment (including fighter jets and helicopters). Egyptian forces have also been directly involved in Libya (although it is unclear exactly when and to what extent).[129] The UAE, which has been a staunch opponent to Islamists throughout the region, has invested substantial resources to counter Libya's MB affiliates. Evidence that the UAE had been shipping weapons to Dignity-allied forces in violation of the UN arms embargo emerged in November 2015.[130] As noted above, Russia has engaged in negotiations with Haftar, and it is possible that Russia has cooperated materially with Haftar as well, although existing evidence is circumstantial at best.[131] Haftar has called on the international community

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[128] Sizer and Pack, "ISIS Fuels Discord in Libya."
[129] Al-Araby al-Jadeed, "Egyptian Army Fighting in Libya: Military Sources," *Alaraby*, accessed October 17, 2016, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/b59d72d8-e685-4eef-9e8a-b78477bfe974; *Libya Herald*, "Egypt Admits to Airstrikes in 2015," October 16, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/10/14/egypt-admits-to-airstrikes-in-2015/.
[130] Kirkpatrick, "Leaked Emirati Emails Could Threaten Peace Talks in Libya."
[131] *Libyan Express,* "Haftar Asks Russia to Lift Arms Embargo and to Apply the Syrian Scenario in Libya," September 28, 2016.

to help the LNA in its fight against extremist groups in Benghazi and throughout Libya, appealing to Western countries to lift the UN arms embargo on Libya.[132] Haftar has gone so far as to hire Canadian lobbying firm to seek United States, European Union, Russian and UN support for Dignity.[133] France appears to be clandestinely operating in Libya in support of Operation Dignity. In July 2016, the BDB shot down a helicopter carrying three French soldiers in Benghazi. The French government initially declined to comment on the incident due to the clandestine nature of their operations in Libya. However it has since been confirmed that France has SOF embedded with Dignity forces, raising questions about counter-ISIL security cooperation providing cover for covert Western involvement in the broader Libyan conflict.[134]

Diplomatic engagement by VNSAs in pursuit of international support and military assistance in violations of existing sanctions is Gray in nature. This is the case despite the fact that much of this support enables Dignity to effectively challenge ISIL.

Informational
Information campaigns on both sides have been crucial in framing the conflict, gaining domestic and international support, and discrediting the opposing side. As discussed previously, the absence of objective reporting in Libya has resulted in political propaganda that passes for news and the development of a conspiracy culture in Libyan society. This has been most evident in the propaganda coming out of Benghazi, which portrays two outrageously different versions of the conflict.[135] The escalation of exaggerated information campaigns resulting from back and forth attempts on both sides to discredit the other's reporting has exacerbated violence between Haftar's Dignity forces and Islamists and jihadists across Libya.

Haftar launched Operation Dignity with a promise to "liberate Benghazi from the clutches of extremist groups." On Dignity's TV station, footage of Haftar on inspection tours of the Benghazi battlefield, set to the score of martial music, is broadcasted along with horrifying clips portraying the victims of "terrorist" violence. Many of Haftar's eastern Libyan supporters believe that the United States does not support Haftar because it is engaged in an international conspiracy with the MB to take over the Middle East. Propaganda goes so far as to feature Obama's 2009 Cairo speech, in which he announces a "new beginning" for relations between America and the Muslim world, as evidence of such a conspiracy.[136]

Much of the Islamist/jihadist propaganda messaging has been handed to them by Haftar, whose anti-Islamist rhetoric and indiscriminate use of force has destroyed homes and lives in Benghazi. The majority

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[132] Ibid.
[133] *The Libya Observer*, "Khalifa Haftar Signs Multi-Million-Dollar Contract with Notorious Canadian Lobbyist to Promote Dignity Operation," accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/khalifa-haftar-signs-multi-million-dollar-contract-notorious-canadian-lobbyist-promote-dignity.
[134] El-Bar, "REVEALED;" "Presence of French Special Forces in Libya Sets off Controversy," Thomas Joscelyn, "Presence of French Special Forces in Libya Sets Off Controversy," *The Long War Journal*, October 22, 2016, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/07/presence-of-french-special-forces-in-libya-sets-off-controversy.php.
[135] Anderson, "Libya's New Strongman."
[136] Ibid.

of Islamists in Libya (including moderate and non-violent Islamists) believe Haftar to be an existential threat.[137] A prime example of Islamist/jihadist counter-messaging can be seen in an October 2014 video released by the BRSC's al-Saraya Media Center. It highlights BRSC's counter-Dignity operations and features former U.S. ally Wissam bin Hamid, who is now one of the key BRSC leaders. The narrator explains, "BRSC has convened a group of battalions, brigades, factions and jihadi groups from among those who had experience and history fighting the tyrant Qaddafi before and after the revolution."[138] This attempt to at once discredit both the United States and liken Haftar (who was a top general under Qaddafi) to Qaddafi himself appeals both to global Muslims aggrieved by the War on Terror and to Libyans who were oppressed by the former regime. Al-Saraya has also published information on what they claim are "foreign drone strikes" on Benghazi, further likening Dignity and the struggle in Benghazi to the United States and the broader War on Terror.[139] They publicize the destruction and human suffering caused by Dignity's indiscriminate use of force and relentless air strikes to consolidate support in Benghazi.[140]

The BDB has been especially active in producing digital media content since the start of 2016. This includes a popular YouTube show by al-Ghariani, one of Haftar's biggest critics. He has repeatedly called for jihad against Dignity forces on television and online broadcasts. He said "those who are fighting on the side of Haftar are dying for his sake, they are dying ignorant. And those who die fighting him, they are martyrs, who sacrificed their lives for God."[141] He is tremendously influential in Libya, and his claims that Haftar is a more important enemy than ISIL have not fallen on deaf ears.[142]

Information engagement on both sides should be classified as Gray, as both side are engaging in escalatory rhetoric. Here, framing of conflict is essential to the use of force on both sides, and is essential in securing both international support and the support of various Libyan publics.

Military

The LNA has relied extensively on airstrikes in its offensive against its enemies in Benghazi. International military assistance has been critical for Dignity's success. The Libyan Air Force, under the umbrella of Haftar's Command, broadcast footage in early March showing the aftermath of an air strike on three ships that had been bringing weapons to Islamists in Benghazi from Misrata. At least half a dozen similar strikes have taken place since October. Senior air force officers say better training, pilots and planes, presumably mostly from Egypt, have given them the ability to spot and hit targets, even at night and at sea.[143] Egyptian military support, most likely backed by the UAE, has significantly advantaged Dignity and

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[137] *Aawsat*, "شرق الأوسط|بار أخ ب ية دولة عربو," accessed October 19, 2016, http://aawsat.com/.

[138] Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar Al Sharia Video Features Jihadist Once Thought to Be US Ally in Benghazi," *The Long War Journal*, October 11, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/10/one-time_us_ally_in.php.

[139] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "September 27, 2016," http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/other-jihadi-actors/other-27-sept-16/.

[140] *Amnesty International*, "Libya: Lives of Captives Trapped under Fire in Benghazi in Danger," July 21, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/libya-lives-of-captives-trapped-under-fire-in-benghazi-in-danger/.

[141] Samia Belqadi, "Libya's Grand Mufti Calls for Jihad against Hifter," *Al-Monitor*, June 11, 2014, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/security/2014/06/libya-grand-mufti-fatwa-hifter.html.

[142] Barr and Blackman, "A New Threat to Libya's Stability Emerges."

[143] Galustian, "Libya - Tribes, Militia, Interests and Intervention."

should be classified as proxy competition within the struggle between the UAE and Qatar for regional influence.[144]

In Benghazi, the anti-Dignity forces have made heavy use of sniper weapons, mines, suicide bombs, IEDs and other conventional and non-conventional weapons, many of which come from the black market.[145] Both BRSC and ASL have used coercive tactics such as using hostages to increase the risk of civilian, collateral damage in an effort to deter their opponent from striking.[146]

Both sides have engaged in Black Zone military aggression that has involved the use of large-scale violence. The use of hostages and human shields in this domain should be classified as Gray, as it is a clear violation of international norms.

Financial

In addition to receiving support from outside states, many militias that were financed by Tripoli's Central Bank during the 2011 Libyan Civil War have not been removed from the payroll under the GNA.[147] It appears that the BRSC, including ASL and other groups, are still receiving financing from the Central Bank. A UN Security Council report has stated "currently, Central Bank operations from Tripoli cannot be neutral because the capital is not controlled by the GNA and is infamous for suffering abductions and extortion."[148] Financial activity of this nature should be classified as Gray Zone, as it is not overt competition but seeks to leverage illegitimate sources of funding to bolster one side's position vis-à-vis the other.

Dyad Summary

Conflict between Dignity and Islamists/Jihadists have largely played out in the information and military domains. In the military domain, conflict was largely Black, although the conflict has significant Gray Zone dimensions when seen as a proxy war between the UAE and Egypt versus Qatar. With regards to information, this dyad is best classified as Gray Zone conflict. Specifically, both sides have utilized information engagement to incite violence against the other side. Diplomatic efforts on both sides are Gray, as both sides are engaged in negotiations to secure support for unsanctioned conflicts in violation of international agreements, such as sanctions on non-state actors in Libya. Both sides further have both been involved in Gray Zone financial acquisitions.

Jihadists vs. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

Despite selective cooperation between jihadist groups and ISIL against Dignity forces in Benghazi, with both sides prioritizing opposition to Dignity over competition with the other, there has been significant intra-jihadist ideological competition in Libya. The most significant competitions have occurred between

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[144] Cafiero, "The UAE and Qatar Wage a Proxy War in Libya"
[145] Occhicone, "Libya 2015."
[146] Ibid.
[147] Kirkpatrick, "Qatar's Support of Islamists Alienates Allies Near and Far."
[148] *Libya Herald*, "UN Report Accuses CBL of Bias and of Supporting Militias and Terrorists," April 16, 2016, http://www.opemam.org/node/8129.

AQ-affiliated organizations and ISIL. In Derna, large-scale military conflict has occurred between ISIL and the DMSC.[149]

Informational

As noted above in *Governments vs. Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant,* one of ISIL's main strategies to establish itself as the sole legitimate Islamic organization relies on the use of narratives that discredit the legitimacy of potential rivals. One of the core arguments advanced by ISIL's propaganda strategy is that AQ is not only ineffective, but also illegitimate. ISIL refers to AQ-affiliated organizations as the "apostate Awakenings," a term which was used to refer to the "Sunni Awakening" in Iraq but has since been expanded to include all non-ISIL jihadist organizations.[150] Both ISIL and AQ have employed information engagement to either recruit or retain fighters and supporters, but have used dramatically different approaches. The fundamental difference is that ISIL has been active and enthusiastic in broadcasting its activities in Libya, openly taking credit for attacks and incidents as they are unfolding, while AQ's strategy has usually been to wait until after a successful external operation takes place before claiming responsibility.[151] ISIL has been successful in gaining recruits from AQ by using its media machine to broadcast its activities on the ground, a strategy that shows supporters, potential recruits and enemies alike that it is actually doing something. This deliberate strategy works in support of ISIL's claim that it is more effective than AQ, which prefers to operate clandestinely to expand its influence on the ground while avoiding the attention of international powers, which it self-consciously admits it cannot defeat militarily. ISIL's flamboyancy attracts international attention, which AQ believes will be detrimental to its longevity in the region. AQ's strategy has proven more effective in Libya, as the international anti-ISIL coalition continues to make military gains against ISIL, leaving AQ free to covertly expand its influence by backing Libyan fighting groups.

Keeping with its "remaining and expanding" slogan, ISIL has tied its strength, legitimacy and viability to its expansion and recruitment of fighters. Its religious and political legitimacy hinges on the ability to create and maintain an Islamic polity that "can claim to represent and ultimately encompass the broader Muslim world."[152] In contrast with AQ, which maintains that conditions for declaring a caliphate have not yet been satisfied, ISIL must aggressively pursue constant, visible, global expansion to maintain its version of legitimacy. Furthermore, for ISIL, expansion and religio-political legitimacy are mutually reinforcing. With every new "province" gained and advertised through propaganda, it enhances its credibility in the eyes of other jihadists, who may be enticed to defect from their organizations and join ISIL.[153] Another of ISIL's core narratives, which seeks to advertise ISIL's jihad as an opportunity for "jihadist camaraderie and adventure," plays on the thrill-seeking tendencies of young jihadists who are bored with AQ's slow and steady approach.[154] This kind of generation Z-focused advertising, which, not coincidentally bear stylistic similarities to Call of Duty-type video games, appeals to "wannabe jihadists"

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[149] Joscelyn, "Islamic State Details Operations against Jihadist Rivals in Derna, Libya."
[150] Ibid.
[151] Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model."
[152] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts."
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.

that desire to "live out their violent video-game fantasies in real life."[155] In addition to attracting these audiences, a main theme advanced by ISIL propaganda is the kinship and social bonds that connect foreign fighters, "a narrative that targets at-risk youth searching for meaningful religious, political or personal identities."[156]

Another one of ISIL's core propaganda narratives seeks to "sow discord in enemy ranks," actively creating and aggravating rifts within rival groups (especially AQ) and creating the perception that they are splintering and falling apart.[157] This strategy, articulated by ISIL spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, who called for ISIL to "divide the groups and break the ranks" of its opponents, targets foot soldiers and mid-level commanders who might be persuaded to defect and join ISIL if they believe their organizations are falling apart. In this regard, ISIL frequently relies on disinformation and exaggeration of its enemies' internal troubles to influence public perception and gain recruits. ISIL has bombarded social media with fabricated tales of "key jihadist" that have defected to ISIL.[158]

In Derna where ISIL and the AQ-affiliated DMSC engaged in open military fighting, both sides have regularly produced propaganda publicizing their successes against the other side. Last year, ISIL's spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, rebuked the DMSC for resisting ISIL's authority and called on DMSC fighters to "repent."[159] ISIL's al-Naba newsletter published an infographic, which tallied up its operations against the DMSC and Libya.[160] It has published a "wanted dead" list of the caliphates enemies, which includes leaders from other jihadist organizations, many of whom are from the DMSC. The "wanted dead" campaign appears to have been part of a strategy to regain momentum in Derna. Every time a "wanted" person is killed, ISIL releases a new version of the graphic, changing the color to signify their death.[161] When in direct military competition with ISIL, AQ ramps up its propaganda strategy to match ISIL's by publicizing their successes. In an attempt to discredit ISIL on the basis of its "extreme" tactics, the DMSC has released videos of adolescents detained after allegedly joining the "caliphate" to carry out suicide attacks in Derna.[162] It hits back at ISIL by advancing the narrative that ISIL is doing a disservice to Muslims by subjugating, oppressing and terrorizing any believers that refuse to join its ranks.[163]

ISIL has also taken advantage of the fact that there is often no competing information coming out of warzones, which are too dangerous for journalists to visit, by concealing its setbacks and either fabricating or exaggerating its gains. This is exemplified by media reports that ISIL had taken control of Derna, a false narrative that had been circulated by ISIL on social media and picked up by mainstream

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[155] Zelin, "The Islamic State's Model."

[156] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts."

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Thomas Joscelyn, "Islamic State Spokesman Calls on Other Factions to 'repent,' Urges Sectarian War," *The Long War Journal*, June 23, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/islamic-state-spokesman-calls-on-other-factions-to-repent.php.

[160] *Eye on ISIS in Libya*, "March 22, 2016."

[161] Thomas Joscelyn, "The Islamic State's 'Wanted Dead' List in Libya," *The Long War Journal*, August 18, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/08/the-islamic-states-wanted-dead-list-in-libya.php.

[162] Joscelyn, "Islamic State Fighters Retreat from Bases outside Derna, Libya."

[163] Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, and Moreng, "How the Islamic State's Propaganda Feeds into Its Global Expansion Efforts."

news, when it was in fact divided among competing military factions, including the DMSC. This example reflects how critical it is for ISIL to avoid admitting defeat, especially at the hands of another jihadist organization.[164]

AQ is taking advantage of the fact that ISIL is dominating domestic and international attention and appears to be slowly expanding its presence in Libya. In addition to its close ties with the BRSC, it seems to have close ties with the BDB. AQ appears to have a calculated strategy for maintaining a covert presence in North Africa, which involves concealing its relationships with local actors, such as the BDB, while still consolidating support for its partners on the ground from afar through messaging that avoids officially declaring its affiliations with such groups to avoid attracting the attention of counterterrorism forces. A social media campaign, initiated only weeks after the BDB's establishment, appears to have been intended to drum up support for the organization by encouraging jihadists to support the "mujahedeen" in Benghazi.[165] The campaign has lent rhetorical support to BDB leaders, such as al-Ghariani, while never explicitly mentioning the BDB by name. Social media accounts affiliated with several prominent AQ figures have launched a propaganda campaign praising the movements in Benghazi and urging Libyan jihadists to join their ranks[166] A statement supposedly from the elusive AQ commander Mokhtar Belmokhtar specifically praised al-Ghariani for "exposing truth in the face of falsehood."[167] Hisham al-Ashmawy, a prominent Egyptian AQ-affiliate leader, praised militants in Benghazi for "defending Islam and its people in the face of the oppression and injustice," and urged young jihadists to support the mujahedeen.[168] Abdallah Muhammed al-Muhaysini, a leading jihadist ideologue based in Syria, similarly urged Libyans to "rush forth to support your brothers" in Benghazi.[169]

Jihadists' use of the informational instrument of power is decidedly Gray Zone activity and sheds light upon AQ's covert strategy and growing influence in Libya.[170] The use of information campaigns to covertly establish a presence on the ground in Libya by transnational organizations such as AQ is one of the most elusive, and potentially the most effective, form of Gray Zone information engagement that has the distinct potential to go on unchallenged by foreign parties distracted by ISIL. For its part, ISIL's use of information engagement to recruit followers from jihadist organization is contributing to much of its success in the Gray Zone.

Military
Open military conflict between jihadists and ISIL has been primarily limited to Derna, where the DMSC militias pushed ISIL out of the city in an unlikely alliance with the LNA. They openly clashed in 2014, and

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[164] *Poynter*, "Without Fact Checking, ISIS' Messages Go Unchallenged," May 7, 2015, http://www.poynter.org/2015/without-fact-checking-isis-messages-go-unchallenged/342737/.
[165] Barr and Blackman, "A New Threat to Libya's Stability Emerges."
[166] Ibid.
[167] Zelin, "New Statement from Al-Murābiṭūn."
[168] *Morisco*, "#د جديد لمة كا ية صوت لاخ ل/ ي أبو عمر المهاجر/ هشام عشماوي -فظه حد الله - Https://Youtu.be/hL-JB9ttKv8 كوا #صارف_حـ ذغازي_بـ pic.twitter.com/ml2PmXCUtn." Twitter Post @*Setmarian3*, June 29, 2016. https://twitter.com/Setmarian3/status/748252124119719936.
[169] Zelin, "New Statement from Al-Murābiṭūn."
[170] Barr and Blackman, "A New Threat to Libya's Stability Emerges."

fighting escalated after ISIL fighters assassinated two key DMSC figures in June 2015.[171] ISIL has used snipers and IEDs. Caliphate fighters have also launched seven commando operations. It has adopted a strategy of killing any rivals or opposition, including jihadist militants.[172] For its part, DMSC has captured and killed key ISIL figures in Derna.[173] While it once controlled much of Derna (certainly not all, as they have claimed in the media), ISIL has been largely forced out of eastern Libya by a combination of DSMC, LNA and foreign-supported anti-ISIL forces.[174]

Financial

As described above, ISIL obtains financing from the population (*See Governments vs. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant).* Jihadist organizations receive covert funding from transnational networks as described in *Dignity vs. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant* and many are still on the payroll of the Tripoli Central Bank.[175] During the first Libyan Civil War, jihadists were included among the groups that received financing in their opposition to Qaddafi by international elements, such as Western governments and their proxies, and anti-Qaddafi government factions. Interim and transitional governments have since failed to cut off the supply chain and many jihadist fighting groups still pose as security forces on the Bank's payroll. Financial activity of this nature, which involves funds obtained covertly and in violation of international norms, should be classified as Gray Zone.

Dyad Summary

This dyad has played out in the informational instrument of power in a profound way. The bulk of this competition has occurred in the Gray Zone and has had tremendous effects on the strength, visibility and future viability of both ISIL and its rival jihadist organizations in Libya. This dyad can be seen as exhibiting the defining characteristics of Gray Zone information engagement by ISIL and AQ, as it appears to occur primarily in an ideological realm, but in reality obscures covert expansion efforts on the part of AQ and allows ISIL to attract militants and exert its power in a physical way. This dyad has also involved the use of Black Zone military activity and Gray Zone financial dealings on both sides.

Conclusion

As indicated, breaking the analysis of Gray Zone conflicts down by the types of conflict dyads occurring and then by the instruments of power utilized within each type of conflict dyad can be instructive. It enables planners to develop typologies and thereby limit the number of distinct groups and instruments of power that must be considered for a particular intervention. While this approach confers numerous benefits, practitioners must keep in mind that Gray Zone conflicts are highly complex systems. Adopting this approach will help in planning interventions against one type of conflict actor, but practitioners must also recognize that intervention against on actor (or system) will also affect other actors (or systems).

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[171] Joscelyn, "Islamic State Details Operations against Jihadist Rivals in Derna, Libya."
[172] Paul Staniland, "Armed Groups and Militarized Elections," *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (December 1, 2015).
[173] *Eye on ISIS in Libya,* "ISIS in Action," accessed October 12, 2016, http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/2016/10/04/.
[174] Joscelyn, "Islamic State Fighters Retreat from Bases outside Derna, Libya."
[175] *Libya Herald*, "UN Report Accuses CBL of Bias and of Supporting Militias and Terrorists."

For example, in the Libyan case, government success against ISIL often strengthens the position of other local jihadist groups and AQ. As such, government planners ought to consider the U.S. Army's new operating concept, "Win in a Complex World." This doctrine implores commanders to not only consider the effects of their planned interventions on the system they are targeting but also its effects on all other systems.[176] A so-called system of systems approach to planning in Gray Zone conflicts will help to avoid negative externalities such as inadvertently strengthening other opposition forces.

When evaluating responses to conflicts involving governments and rival governments, practitioners should devote significant attention to the use of diplomatic and legal instruments of power as they heavily influence the outcome of these dynamics. When addressing competitions which involve religiously-affiliated VNSAs, the informational and military instruments of power deserve the most attention as these are the most consequential instruments in these dyads.

Finally, SOF must recognize that alliances are fleeting and willingness to cooperate with them varies both over space and time. Only by understanding the hyper-local situation in their areas of operations, can SOF avoid negative externalities when collaborating with VNSAs.

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[176] U.S. Army, *The Operations Process,* Field Manual No. 5-0, Washington, D.C., March 2010.

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