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From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Sunday, October 02, 2011 12:22 PM
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Subject: Tripoli gets new militia, apparent rebuff to Islamists (Reuters)

TRIPOLI (Reuters) - A Libyan revolutionary officer announced the creation on Sunday of an armed group to keep order in Tripoli, a mission analysts say may overlap uneasily with an existing Military Council with the same job which is led by a prominent Islamist.

Announcing the Tripoli Revolutionists Council at a news conference in the capital, Abdullah Ahmed Naker said his force had 22,000 armed men at its disposal, drawn from what he said were 73 factions which had agreed to pool resources.

The move may stir concern about tensions among the many revolutionary militias who play a de facto security role in the capital, where residents say they fear some groups may resort to violence as they jockey for power.

Visiting U.S. Republican Senator John McCain called on the country's interim rulers, the unelected National Transitional Council (NTC), last week to move quickly to get the armed groups under control.

Naker said his group was cooperating with the Tripoli Military Council which is led by Abdulhakim Belhadj, a veteran Islamist foe of Muammar Gaddafi.

He said it would protect citizens' security and property, collect unlicensed weapons, support humanitarian relief work and help create civil society institutions.

But Naker, wearing military fatigues and flanked by tense-looking fighters cradling assault rifles, suggested Belhadj's group, believed by diplomats to be supported by Qatar, was not representative of Tripoli's population and not large enough.

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"We established the council because we saw that Tripoli people are marginalised ... They have not been invited to participate in any entity in the new government," he said.

Naker said his forces were already in control of 75 percent of the capital. They could extend their area of operations but did not want disputes with other factions.

He said his relations were normal with Belhadj but he did not know much about his background.

"Who is he? Who appointed him?" he said.

Belhadj led an Islamist guerrilla uprising against Gaddafi in the 1990s. He later spent time with Taliban and al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan but says he opposed al Qaeda's transnational campaign of anti-Western violence.

Naker said Belhadj's military clout was "weak" as he had only 2,000 men. He alleged the Military Council's forces had staged night raids on private homes that had caused ill-feeling among Tripoli residents.

Spokesmen for the Military Council and the NTC could not immediately be reached for comment.

An analyst in Tripoli who did not want to be identified said Naker's remarks suggested he was a supporter of interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, a Western-trained technocrat widely regarded as an opponent of Islamist forces in the country.

Supporters of Belhadj make little secret of their disdain for Jibril, who they say is seeking to exclude them from a share of power following Gaddafi's fall.

Naker said his council was working under the auspices of de facto head of state Mustafa Abdel Jalil and was "cooperating" with the Tripoli Military Council on bringing safety back to Tripoli.

It would be dissolved when state institutions were up and running again, he said.

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