



## **Libya Now Assuming a Central Place in Islamic Caliphate Thrust Against Egypt, Maghrebi States, and Africa**

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### **Executive Summary**

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- \* The consolidation of a self-proclaimed Caliphate in eastern Libya — the reincarnation of the Darna Emirate in line with *takfiri jihadist* tenets — provides the *jihadist* camp with springboard into Africa and southern Europe. That strategic thrust, supported strongly by Qatar, Sudan, Iran, and Turkey, has already begun, and highlights the transformation of the *takfiri jihadist* movements, the Muslim Brothers, and many of the former *al-Qaida* movements.
- \* By early 2015, Libya no longer existed as a viable state, having morphed, at least for the time being, into a web of small fiefdoms fighting each other.
- \* Concurrently, the uppermost leadership of the Islamic Caliphate started to openly highlight the strategic importance of Libya: that is, the Libyan *Wilayat* (Province) of the Caliphate.
- \* Starting early February 2015, Libya's internationally recognized government and the Egyptian government embarked on a joint effort to contain the *jihadist* up-surge as the first step in a long and arduous road toward restoring Libya to functioning statehood.
- \* Barring the empowerment of, and support for, Libya's internationally recognized government in their desperate struggle against the rapidly growing state-sponsored Islamist-*jihadist* menace - the *jihadists* and their sponsoring states will soon transform Libya into their springboard for *jihadist* surges into western Africa and southern Europe.

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## Analysis

The consolidation of a self-proclaimed Caliphate in eastern Libya — the reincarnation of the Darna Emirate in line with *takfiri jihadist* tenets — provides the *jihadist* camp with springboard into Africa and southern Europe. That strategic thrust, supported strongly by Qatar, Sudan, Iran, and Turkey, has already begun, and highlights the transformation of the *takfiri jihadist* movements, the Muslim Brothers (*Ikhwan*), and many of the former *al-Qaida* movements.

Although *jihadist* forces occupied Tripoli in October 2011 — as a direct result of the Western military intervention which helped bring down the Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi Administration in Libya — they failed to consolidate power and focus on all-Islamist causes. Subsequently, Libya sank into the still-escalating fratricidal fighting between a myriad of militias and localized forces. Starting early 2014, the *jihad*-sponsoring states have capitalized on the building chaos in order to transform *jihadist*-held parts of Libya into secure springboards for the spread of *takfiri jihadism* into both western Africa and southern Europe.

By early 2015, Libya no longer existed as a viable state, having morphed, at least for the time being, into a web of small fiefdoms fighting each other.

Libyan *jihadists* affiliated with global entities, foreign *jihadists*, and *jihad*-sponsoring states played a decisive rôle in the victory of the Libyan uprising and the toppling of the Qadhafi Government in 2011. While NATO airpower was instrumental in destroying Qadhafi's military machine, the *jihadist* camp was decisive in seizing power on the ground to the detriment of Libya's myriad of indigenous tribes and clans. These contradictions are at the crux of the fratricidal fighting throughout the area of what once was Libya, and adjacent regions.

## Background

Iran, Sudan, and their proxies — mainly the HAMAS and the *HizbAllah* — were the first *jihadist* entities on the ground in eastern Libya in 2011, both helping the anti-Qadhafi upsurge and finding out how they could benefit from the prevailing chaos. A few Iranian and Sudanese officers had already arrived in Benghazi from Sudan in the third week of February 2011, and met with Libyan senior officers who had defected to the rebels.

In March 2011, the IRGC established a high-level command center in Benghazi. IRGC Brig.-Gen. Mehdi Rabbani — a close confidant of *Quds* Forces commander Qassem Soleimani and the deputy commander of the IRGC Tharallah Base in Tehran — was nominated the commander of the Libyan operation. (In December 2012, Rabbani was promoted IRGC Deputy Chief of Operations and put in charge of such key issues as the defense of the Persian Gulf.) The on-site senior Iranian operative was Ibrahim Muhammad Judaki of the *Quds* Forces contingent in Lebanon. His deputy was Khalil Harb, then the Special Advisor to the *HizbAllah*'s Secretary General in charge of cooperation with and support for Palestinian, Yemeni, and other sensitive groups. Another senior member of the Iranian group was Abdul Latif al-Ashkar, one of the main logistics experts of the HAMAS who was target killed by Israel near Port Sudan, Sudan, on the night of April 6/7, 2011.

The initial mission was to expedite the purchase of weapons and ammunition for all anti-Western *jihadist* forces. The Iranians brought with them several millions in hard currency (dollars and *euros*). Special attention was paid to the purchase of chemical warfare (CW) munitions for HAMAS and *HizbAllah*. Tehran's objective was to provide their protégés with CW capabilities from third-party sources so that Iran would not be implicated and subjected to retaliation should HAMAS or *HizbAllah* use these weapons against Israel. In late March 2011, the first two small convoys set on their way to Sudan via Kufra. One convoy carried tactical containers and the



other a few shells. This endeavor led Israel to target kill Abdul Latif al-Ashkar as he was preparing to ship the weapons from Sudan to the Gaza Strip via the Sinai Peninsula.

The Sunni *jihadists* — both Libyans and foreigners — who arrived to help their LIGF (*Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya*: LIFG) brethren in Cyrenaica quickly consolidate a *jihadist* bastion under the Emirate's banner. One of the key principles of the 2004/5 *jihadist* doctrine for localized *jihad*s articulated by Ayman al-Zawahiri and the *Shura Kabira* is to seize foothold for *jihad*, and a possible base for the *jihadist* trend, anywhere possible and even if in cooperation or partnership with non-Islamist elements. With Cyrenaica becoming an important bastion of *jihadism*, as well as a gateway to Egypt, Sudan, the Sahel, and southern Europe, it was imperative to further consolidate the *jihadist* safe-haven the moment conducive conditions arose. The *jihadists* quickly ensured that no future government of Libya would be able to undermine the LIFG-dominated emirate between Darna and Baida unless they unleashed a most violent civil war. Indeed, the *jihadists* immediately started to dispatch convoys of trucks full of weapons and ammunition from eastern Libya via Chad to AQIM (*al-Qaida* in the Islamic Maghreb) bases in the Sahel (mainly Niger and Mali).

Meanwhile, in the Autumn of 2011, the Libyan chaos served as a cover for the consolidation of numerous *jihadist* entities focusing on other *jihadist* fronts. However, it took the intervention of various *jihad*-sponsoring states — mainly Qatar, Turkey, and Iran — to transform the *jihadist* victory in Libya into an effective springboard for the export of *jihadism* throughout vast regions. The number one lesson which Doha drew from the Libya crisis — Qatar's first real surge onto the big-power politics — was that money was not enough, and that there was no substitute to actual intervention on the ground in the subversive and military operations. Hence, Doha embarked on the building of a "*jihadist* Foreign Legion" which would provide Qatar with the ability to intervene in Sunni contingencies, starting with the then-fledgling Syrian *jihad*.

The then-Qatari Chief of Staff, Maj.-Gen. Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah, personally oversaw the military aspects of the program. The Commander in Chief was the Libyan *jihadist* commander Abdel Hakim Belhaj. This nomination kept him away from the turmoil in Libya and the NTC's inability to install him as either Minister of Defense or Army Chief. Belhaj's deputies were Al-Mahdi Hatari (the former commander of the Tripoli Brigade) and Kikli Adem (Belhaj's loyal right-hand man from his LIFG days). The main training facilities for the Legion were in Darna, the center of the Libyan *jihadist* emirate.

Between early 2011 and early 2014, the Islamist *jihadist* world was consumed by a great theological debate about their future in view of the grassroots *intifadas* which shook the Middle East. Osama bin Laden's *Shura Kabira* never really believed in the realistic prospects of enduring *jihadist* states as viable sources for the spread of *jihad*, and rejected the concept as a viable goal after the collapse of the Taliban's Emirate in Afghanistan.

Although bin Laden led the campaign to help the *intifadas*, he did not believe the nascent Islamist states like then-Pres. Mohammed Morsi's Egypt would endure against a hostile world. In contrast, a group of neo-*salafi* scholars considered the *intifadas* as the beginning of the fateful "End-of-Time Battle" for the Middle East. According to tradition, this apocalyptic battle would be waged in ash-Sham on the plain of Dabiq. The scholars defined the theological prerequisites for expediting this battle in what they called "the Khorasan Pledge", starting with the imperative of a *jihadist* caliphate.

The first such Caliphate is being implemented in al-Jazira under the new "Emir of the Faithful", Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurashi. Another key issue dividing the *jihadist* world was cooperation with Shi'ite Iran, which Zawahiri encouraged given the immense benefits derived by the *jihadists*, and Baghdadi initially forbade on account of Sunni orthodoxy but later slightly relaxed for pragmatic reasons.



This profound theological debate (within Sunni Islamism) slowed down the consolidation of the *jihadi* springboards in Libya and other *jihadi* fronts all over the world.

### Consolidation and Acceleration of a *Jihadist* Caliphate in Eastern Libya

The consolidation of a *jihadi* Caliphate in eastern Libya accelerated starting early 2014 because of the need to support the Egyptian Islamist *jihadists* against the growing power and popularity of Pres. Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. In March, a wide coalition of *jihadists* — including the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, HAMAS, and *al-Qaida* — started building a Free Egyptian Army in eastern Libya under Qatari, Turkish, and Iranian patronage.

The “emir” of the Free Egyptian Army (FEA) is Sharif al-Radwani. The Army’s liaison officer with the Qataris is Abu-Ubaida, a veteran *al-Qaida* commander who had worked with the Qataris in Libya, Syria, and other sensitive projects. The initial objectives of the FEA are to target vital installations, to storm prisons to free Muslim Brothers detainees, and to make Sisi’s Egypt ungovernable. The Libyan intelligence services supported these preparations. Large quantities of weapons, vehicles and other equipment were delivered to the Egyptian groups and stored in the Darna Emirate, pending dispatch into Egypt.

Meanwhile, as of Spring 2014, the theological character of the *jihadi* movement in Libya had been tied intimately to the transformation of the *jihadi* movement in the Maghreb and the Sahel. No *jihadi* movement could escape the brewing schism between the traditional *jihadism* represented by the *al-Qaida* supreme leadership in Afghanistan-Pakistan and the ascent of *takfiri jihadism* spearheaded by the Khorasan Pledge scholars and implemented by the KHI (*Al-khilafa al-Islamiya* or the Islamic Caliphate) in al-Jazira.

In June 2014, AQIM leaders sought to reconcile between the *al-Qaida Shura Kabira* and the Khorasan Pledge scholars. In a June 22, 2014, communiqué, AQIM recognized Ayman al-Zawahiri’s pre-eminence as “our *Sheikh* and *Emir*”, and urged DI’ISH to reconcile. However, when AQIM’s appeals were rejected by the *al-Qaida Shura Kabira*, AQIM announced its support for the DI’ISH.

On July 1, 2014, *Sheikh* Abdullah Othman al-Assimi posted a video-message in the name of *al-Qaidat Jihad* in the Maghreb and Trans-Saharan Regions. Assimi, whose real name is unknown, is the organization’s leader and a prominent Islamist jurist. His home base is in the mountains and forests of Boumerdes and Tizi-Ouzou in Algeria. “My group wants to build friendly ties with DI’ISH. You are dearer to us than our tribe and family, and you will always have our support,” Assimi said. “We are still waiting for *al-Qaida* branches across the world to reveal their stance and declare their support for [DI’ISH].” Assimi alluded to his support for the *takfiri* interpretations of the laws of *jihad*. “After the silence of the people concerned, we wanted to show our stance for the sake of justice so that the DI’ISH *jihadists* know that we will not fail them. We tell all Muslims that we have seen justice in the DI’ISH approach and they are among the most obedient of Allah’s people and the most dedicated to the Prophet.”

This was a very important endorsement of the tenets articulated in the Khorasan Pledge.

Meanwhile, a group of Libyan *mujahedin*, including veterans of the Syrian *jihad*, announced in mid-June 2014 the formation of a *takfiri jihadi* group in eastern Libya called the *al-Battar* Brigade. The Brigade was modeled after the DI’ISH and was formally affiliated with it through Libyan *mujahedin* in both Libya and al-Jazira. The primary objective of the Al-Battar Brigade was to establish control over the city of Darna — the heart of Libyan Islamism and *jihadism* — and eradicate traitors to the *jihadi takfiri* cause. “We will cut off heads, slit stomachs and fill Libya with graves” in order to attain these objectives, the *Al-Battar* communique said. At the same time, *al-Battar* Brigade continued to cooperate with *al-Qaida’s Ansar Al-Sharia*, the *jihadi* primary entity



expediting the movement of *jihadists* and weapons between the Syria-Iraq theater and local centers such as Libya.

In late-July, regional *jihadist* leaders met in southern Libya in order to better coordinate operations, examine the possible unification of Maghreb and Sahel groups, and agree on a common position regarding the theological dispute between Zawahiri and Baghdadi. The gathering included senior commanders from AQIM, *Ansar al-Sharia* (Tunisia and Libya), *Ansar Bait al-Maqdis* (Egypt), *El Mourabitounes* and *Ansar al-Din* (northern Mali). By mid-August 2014, the presence of *takfiri jihadists* affiliated with the KHI throughout the Maghreb and the Sahel was palpable. The *takfiri jihadists* vastly expanded recruitment of volunteers for fighting in the ranks of the KHI in Syria-Iraq. They also oversaw the conversion of existing networks and groups to *takfiri jihadism*.

The process has accelerated by the return of combat veteran *jihadists* to the Maghreb and the Sahel.

Some of these veterans assumed command of *takfiri jihadist* entities and raised the banner of the Caliphate. Led by Algerian commander Luqman Abu Sakhr, the Tunisia-based *Uqba Ibn Nafi* Brigade formally joined the KHI. The Brigade also claimed responsibility for the July 2014 killing of 15 Tunisian Army soldiers on the border with Algeria. In mid-September 2014, senior commander Khaled Abu Suleiman (real name Gouri Abdelmalek) noted that since “the Maghreb has deviated from the true path [of *jihad*]” he was pulling his men from affiliation with AQIM. He announced the establishment of the Caliphate Soldiers in Algeria (*Jound al-Khilafa fi Ard al-Jazayer*) and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic Caliphate. The Caliphate Soldiers kidnapped and beheaded a French national to demonstrate their adherence to the *takfiri* doctrine of Baghdadi’s Caliphate. Moreover, both Abu Ayaz, the leader of *Ansar al-Sharia* of Tunisia, and Muhammad al-Zahawi, the leader of *Ansar al-Sharia* of Libya, gravitated toward *takfiri jihadism* as a result of deep theological discussions with Luqman Abu Sakhr.

Consequently, the main regional commanders joined the preparations for the establishment of an Islamic State in the Islamic Maghreb (ISIM). Mokhtar Belmokhtar, currently the leader of the *al-Murabitun* in southern Libya, is the leading candidate for the post of Emir of the ISIM. In the Autumn of 2014, he oversaw the organizing of the so-called “Salvador Triangle” in the no-man’s land formed by the borders of Libya, Algeria and Niger. Cadres of *al-Murabitun*, *al-Battar* and foreign expert *jihadist* established three secret training camps in southern Libya. These camps serve as the center of *takfiri jihadism* throughout the Maghreb and the Sahel, providing expert training, organizing and equipping for several hundred *jihadists* at any given time.

### Important Developments in Khartoum

However, the most important development affecting the *jihadist* trend in Libya, and the entire western Africa region, was taking place in Khartoum.

Starting in late Spring 2014, Khartoum and Tehran began to restore their surge into western Africa. It was not a simple decision for Khartoum because Sudan was by then deeply involved in sponsoring and assisting a myriad of Sunni *jihadist* movements throughout the Middle East. Some of these groups were vehemently anti-Shi’ite and anti-Iran *takfiri jihadist* groups. Moreover, Sudanese intelligence was closely cooperating with Turkish intelligence and the key conservative Sunni Gulf States led by Qatar.

In Summer 2014, Sudan Pres. Umar al-Bashir instructed the entire national security and intelligence elite of Sudan to re-examine the country’s overall defense posture in view of the prevailing and emerging threats and opportunities.



On July 1, 2014, Bashir chaired a milestone meeting in Khartoum with the country's most senior military and security officials in which the overall strategic posture of Sudan was assessed.<sup>1</sup> Special attention was paid to the strategic relations with Iran and their impact on the situation *vis-à-vis* Libya. Gen. Siddiq Amer, the Director General of Intelligence and Security, told Bashir that "Iran trained for us a hundred officers in advanced technological fields and areas like decoding, spying, in addition to MI [military intelligence] crafts, and supplied us with all the necessary equipment for [Sudan's] information war."

Gen. Yahia Muhammad Kheir, the Minister of State for Defense, summed up Iran's contribution to Sudan's strategic capabilities and particularly the transfer of weapon systems from Libya. "Two-thirds of Qadhafi's sophisticated armaments are in our hands," Kheir stated. Qadhafi "didn't use them because he lacked some technique [ie: technical expertise], but our experts in collaboration with the Iranian experts managed to develop some missiles [and make them operational]." Lt.-Gen. Ismail Breima Abdel-Samad, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, added that the Iran-built Kenana Air Base south of Khartoum was the center of the strategic program. "Kenana Air Base is place[d] underground and designed with highly advance technologies and proper security measures. This is where we store all the cargos of weapons we receive from our friends."

Bashir summed up the discussions by asserting Sudan's policies and future objectives. He stressed the importance of Sudan's continued involvement in Libya in support for the *jihadist* forces. He noted: "We really benefit from Qadhafi's armaments which are in our hands, we can [further] develop them. Our allies from the Islamic movements are strong. We shall contribute in training the Libyan army. I've advised them to ensure that all the army and security [forces] are loyal to the Islamists. You must continue the coordination with them. Then the Libyan political decision will end up in our hands and under our control in case the Islamic movements succeeded to crush Haftar. [Tell the Libyan authorities] that we would secure the oil reserves [for them]. It is clear that the Islamists will win due to the serious support from Qatar and Iran, as you know. Today, the Libyans have joint forces with us and we are supporting them with armaments and intelligence. Tchad [Chad] is a strategic ally and we have joint forces with them. Additionally, the Chadian opposition is also under our control and we can benefit from them by keeping them as a reserve force."

In conclusion, Bashir emphasized that Sudan's international relations must always be second to "our relations with Iran, and the Muslim Brothers, and the *salafi-jihadist* movements that are financed by Iran and Qatar". Sudan "cannot change our relations with Iran and our brothers" on account of "useless relationships" with Arab and Western states. Bashir stressed that these assertions stem from the quintessence of the government in Khartoum. "We are Islamic resistance revolutionaries, and we refuse the domination of America in the Arab world and [the] African continent. Our religion teaches us and encourages us to fight and terrorize the enemy, plus preparing force to confront him. Our martyrs [go] to heaven and their dead [go] to hell. [There is] no way to stop the *jihad*," Bashir decreed.

On August 31, 2014, the entire leadership met in Khartoum for a top secret strategy formulation deliberation on the basis of the July 1, 2014, meeting with Bashir. Gen. Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, the Minister of Defense, asserted that the special relations with Iran were to remain the crux of Sudan's national security:

"I shall start with our relationship with Iran and say it is a strategic and everlasting relationship. We cannot compromise or lose it. All the advancement in our military industry is from Iran. They opened the doors of their stores of weapons for us, at a time the Arabs stood against us.

<sup>1</sup> The quotations from both the July 1 and August 31, 2014, meetings in Khartoum come from the excellent translation of the minutes of that meeting provided by Professor Eric Reeves.





The Iranian support came when we were fighting a rebellion that spread in all directions including the National Democratic Alliance. The Iranians provided us with experts and they trained our MI [Military Intelligence] and security cadres. They also trained us in weapons production and transferred to us modern technology in the military production industry. There is one full battalion of the Republican Guards still with us here and other experts who are constructing interception and spying bases in order to protect us, plus an advanced Air Defense system. They built for us Kenana and Jebel Awliya Air Force bases.”

Gen. Siddiq Amer, the Director-General of Intelligence and Security, concurred and stated that “Iran is our biggest ally in the region, in terms of cooperation in the areas of intelligence and military industrial production. We have relations with all the Islamic Movements World Wide and we represent a door for Iran to all these Islamic groups.” Amer reinforced an earlier comment by Hussein about the extent of Sudan’s reach in the jihadist circles. Hussein noted that “the ISIS and the other *jihadist* movements are newly formed and can move freely outside the traditional surveillance networks. Currently, there are twenty thousand (20,000) jihadists and fifteen (15) newly formed *jihadist* Movements who are scattered all over, from Morocco to Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, all the Gulf States, a wide presence in Africa and Europe and nobody owns a database on that as the one we have.”

Gen. Yahya Muhammad Kheir, the Minister of State for Defense, raised the possibility of cooperating with the Gulf States on issues that include Africa.

The intelligence services of several Gulf States were seeking Sudan’s help with intelligence and contacts because the Gulf States did not know anything about the Islamist groups in Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, Mali, and the North African Arab Countries. Kheir recommended that Khartoum cooperated with the Gulf States to the extent that Sudanese interests were furthered and that Sudan’s vital interests were not affected. “We will not sacrifice our relations with the Islamists and Iran for a relationship with the Saudis and the Gulf States,” Kheir stated. Amer also saw no problem balancing between the Gulf States and Iran. “We are capable of misleading the Gulf States by taking open, declared steps and procedures towards improving diplomatic relations with them,” he assured.

The meeting also delved on Sudan’s relations with the *jihadist* forces in Libya and their impact on Sudan’s growing cooperation with Qatar and Turkey in sponsoring *jihadist* forces throughout Africa. Hussein explained that practical cooperation had already begun in Libya. He illustrated Sudan’s unique rôle as a mediator between Iran and the Sunni powers. In late July 2014, Hussein noted, “they [the Iranians] transported to us BM [anti-aircraft] missile launchers and their rockets using civil aviation planes. We stored them in Kenana and sold part of them to Qatar to support Libya fighters after they were subjected to attacks by the Egyptian and Emirates air forces. That helped them to achieve victory.”

Gen. Imad al-Din Adawy, the Chief of Joint Operations, elaborated on the latest developments in the cooperation with and in Libya. “Our joint forces with Tchad [Chad] are in their best state. The Libyan border is totally secured, especially after the victory of our allies (the Libya Dawn Forces) in Tripoli. We managed to deliver to them the weapons and military equipment donated by Qatar and Turkey and we formed a joint operations room with them under one of the colonels in order to coordinate and administer the military operations. Turkey and Qatar provided us with information in favor of the revolutionaries on top of the information collected by our own agents so they can control the whole country.”



Amer pointed out to the prospects for long-term relations with Libya through the professional assistance by Sudanese Intelligence. “We have intensified the work to train and graduate Libyan MI cadres. Currently, they are doing an advanced course on Internet operation, deciphering of codes, interception of telephones and wireless radios. Their leadership requested us to train and establish for them a strong MI system.” It is through the Libyan Military Intelligence that Sudan would not only dominate Islamist-*jihadi* Tripoli, but also open the back door for Iran.

### Intelligence Cooperation

Meanwhile, Summer 2014 saw the building of relations and cooperation between the intelligence services of Iran, Sudan, Qatar, and Turkey in Libya and the acceptance of the central and unique rôle of Sudan. Back in early Summer of 2014, Nouri Abusahmain — then still the Islamist president of the Libyan General National Congress (in office between June 25, 2013, and August 4, 2014) — made a secret trip to Khartoum and requested funding and arms shipments in order to sustain the hold onto power by *jihadi* militias affiliated with the Muslim Brothers.

The Libyans nominated Ahmad al-Zuway, an *Ikhwan* official with tribal links in Sudan, as the front man for the military-intelligence cooperation with Sudan. Zuway’s first task was to oversee the flow of arms and *jihadi*s in cars and trucks from north-western Sudan to Kufra (in the south-east of Libya’s Cyrenaica region). Consequently, the *Ikhwan* could expand the *jihadi* Dawn militias with fighters, weapons and ammunition from Sudan.

During the Summer, Sudan launched supplies by air to the Tripoli-Misurata area. The coastal highway from the Benghazi-area stockpiles in the east and the Tripoli-Misurata area in the west was blocked in several sectors, so on-land traffic was impossible. Consequently, Libya’s various *jihadi* militias became increasingly dependent on supplies flown from Sudan over the Sahara. As the *jihadi* forces closed on Benghazi, Sudanese transport aircraft directly supplied the forces advancing from Darna in the east and Misurata in the west. In early September 2014, Sudan began to directly supply the *jihadi* Dawn militias in the Tripoli area.

Transport aircraft flew from Sudan, landed and refueled in Kufra, and continued to the Tripoli airport of Mitiga, which is controlled by the Dawn militias. These supplies enabled the Dawn militias to sustain their hold over the vital Tripoli-Misurata area, forcing the Libyan politicians opposed to the Islamists to escape to Tobruk near the Egyptian border. Meanwhile, to expedite the flow of arms and ammunition, Sudan also began to supply Kufra by air in addition to the ongoing truck convoys.

By Autumn 2014, Doha decided to institutionalize and formalize the cooperation with Khartoum in order to ensure that it was not banished from Libya and other up-and-coming *jihadi* fronts, mainly in Africa. During October 2014, Doha and Khartoum negotiated several secret and not-secret Sudanese-Qatari agreements. In early November 2014, Qatari Minister of Defense Hamad bin Ali al-Attiyah and the Sudanese Minister of Defense Gen. Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein signed a comprehensive military cooperation agreement in Doha. The signing ceremony was attended by the Chief-of-Staff of the Qatari Armed Forces, Maj.-Gen. Ghanim bin Shaheen al-Ghanim, who handles the day-to-day implementation.

The agreement covers “training, formation, exchange of expertise, joint exercises, joint investments, exchange of visits, promotion of cooperation between the two armies, and the exchange of military studies on the level of military academic institutions”. The agreement also provided for “the exchange of expertise in logistics and industrial fields including detached service of officers and experts along with the military medical cooperation”;





that is, Qatari participation in the Sudanese out of country endeavors. As part of the military cooperation agreement, Qatar committed to “supply Sudan with the natural gas”. In the secret agreement on intelligence cooperation, Qatar committed to sponsoring and funding a myriad of Sudanese (and Iranian) *jihadi* initiatives mostly throughout Africa.

It is understood in Doha that in the context of the new bilateral relations, Khartoum would intercede with Tehran not to undermine the al-Thani rule in Qatar and to continue to use Qatar as the lucrative main venue for illegal technology imports and sanctions-busting oil and gas exports.

In late-November 2014, Maj.-Gen. Ghanim bin Shaheen led a large delegation of military and intelligence officials on a follow-up visit to Khartoum. He was hosted by Sudan’s Gen. Hussein. The delegations discussed the further expansion and consolidation of the special relations and cooperation between the armed forces of Qatar and Sudan. Concurrently, Sudan’s Information Minister, Dr Ahmed Bilal, arrived in Doha in order to address the public political aspects of the new relations. Bilal delivered a speech praising “the relations between Qatar and Sudan” and describing them as “strong, long-standing and well-developed ties”.

Bilal was effusive in his praise of official Qatar. “The people of Sudan owe a debt of gratitude to the Emir HH *Sheikh* Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Father Emir HH *Sheikh* Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Government and people of Qatar for the support extended to Sudan in all conditions and in all fields.”

Concurrent changes in eastern Libya manifested the Sudanese-Qatari cooperation.

Back in September 2014, 15 Qatar-sponsored KHI operatives led by an Egyptian and a Saudi Arabian senior commanders arrived in Darna from Syria via Turkey. The delegation included top jurist Turki al-Bin’ali and Abu Nabil al-Anbari, the former “emir” of Iraq’s Anbar province. Their mission was to establish a KHI branch in Libya. By late October 2014, more than 50 Darna *jihadi*s publicly pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and declared their commitment to establishing a Darna Caliphate in Cyrenaica. Using the weapons and funds received from Sudan, they built an 800-strong force operating at least six camps outside Darna as well as a few large training facilities in the Green Mountains for Libyan, Egyptian and foreign *jihadi*s. By mid-November 2014, they seized control of the entire city of Darna with the KHI’s black banners flying over all government buildings.

On December 12, 2014, the *Mujahedin Shura* Council of Cyrenaica urged all Islamist forces to join a coalition led by the Darna Caliphate, and all the Islamist militias in eastern Libya, including the Sudan-sponsored Libyan Dawn forces, recognized the new coalition.

The *jihadi*s celebrated the announcement with a military parade in Darna led by tanks and technicals adorned with black flags. Combat proven commanders from Syria, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt arrived in Darna from the KHI to help expand the training and force building efforts. They established three major training camps in Nawfaliyah (near Sirte), Sabratha, and Darna for Libyan and African fighters. Sudanese military technicians also arrived in Darna to build communications facilities as well as maintain the combat aircraft, tanks, artillery and rockets in the *jihadi*s’ arsenal. By month end, these Sudanese technicians were instrumental in servicing and arming the few combat aircraft seized by the Libyan Dawn, and thus enabling the Libyan pilots to bomb and set aflame several oil tanks in the Sidra port.

With the Darna Caliphate secure, Sudan and its allies — Qatar, Turkey, and, behind the scenes, Iran — could capitalize on the huge stockpiles left there by the Qadhafi Government in order to support African *jihad*s. For example, the support for the *Boko Haram* was put under a single manager: a coordinator for the communica-



tions, weapons supplies and financing delivered from Libya via Sudan. Known only by *nom de guerre* Abu Kudes, he is an Egyptian, an *Ikhwan* activist and originally a “professor” from Al-Azhar University, Cairo, who was involved in earlier *jihadist* logistical efforts in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Turkey-Syria.

In late 2014, Abu Kudes was coordinating the delivery of weapons from stockpiles in Cyrenaica with the assistance of logistical experts from Sudanese and Turkish intelligence. Qatari intelligence was funding all the *jihadist* logistical operations in Cyrenaica.

### Developments in 2015

By early 2015, the uppermost leadership of the Islamic Caliphate started to openly highlight the strategic importance of Libya: that is, the Libyan *Wilayat* (Province) of the KHI. A clear manifestation of the trend was the publication in early January 2015 of an essay called “Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State” in the KHI’s main electronic venue. The gist of the essay was the imperative for the KHI to expand into, and then surge from, Libya. The author identified himself as a Libyan supporter of the Caliphate.

The essay<sup>2</sup> explains that “by the grace of God to Libya, God bestowed upon this country a strategic position and immense potential. These are things from which it would be possible to derive great benefits if they were efficiently exploited. Unfortunately, some supporters do not recognize the extent of the Libyan arena, the proliferation of variant weaponry within it, its geographic dimensions and its critical environs. Sufficed to say, Libya looks upon the sea, the desert, mountains, and six states: Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria, and Tunisia.”

The author emphasizes the unique potential of Libya as a springboard for a *jihadist* invasion of southern Europe. Libya, he writes, “has a long coastline and looks upon the southern Crusader states, which can be reached with ease by even a rudimentary boat and note that the number of ‘illegal immigration’ trips from this coast is massive, estimated to be as high as 500 people a day, as a low estimate. According to many [of these immigrants], it is easily possible to pass through Maritime Security Checkpoints and arrive in cities. If this was even partially exploited and developed strategically, pandemonium could be wrought in the southern Europe. It is even possible that there could be a closure of shipping lines because of the targeting of Crusader ships and tankers.”

The essay concluded by reiterating the geo-strategic importance of Libya to the expansion of the Caliphate in and beyond the Greater Middle East. “My brothers, Libya, by the permission of God, is the key to Egypt, the key to Tunisia, Sudan, Mali, Algeria, and Niger too. It is the anchor from which can be reached Africa and the Islamic Maghreb.”

The author urged the *takfiri jihadist* trend to expedite the liberation of Libya before the West realized the threat Libya constituted itself and before the West would attempt to intervene anew in Libya. “It is imperative that the *mujahedin* move to try to prevent the continuation of [the Crusader] plan and fix the differences between Libyans so that they may direct their energies towards the real enemy, the real tyrants, those who have as their masters the Crusaders. If that happens, which it will, if God permits it, then no force will stand in the way of the *mujahedin*. Not only will pressure on the land of the Caliphate in ash-Sham be relieved, but the territories of the Caliphate in ash-Sham, Iraq, and Hijaz will be linked with those of their brothers in Libya and the Islamic Maghreb and the defeat of all regimes and tyrants in their way will be enabled. That is not difficult for God.”

<sup>2</sup> All quotations are from the translation and analysis of *Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State* by Charlie Winter of the Quilliam Foundation.



In February 2015, the Caliphate in eastern Libya was ready to surge into the *jihadist* center stage.

The KHI uppermost leadership concurred and facilitated the dissemination of the Libyan Caliphate's message in its primary venue, *Al-Hayat* Media. On February 15, 2015, the Libyan Caliphate posted a graphic five-minute video titled "A Message Signed With Blood To The Nation Of The Cross". The video began with the marching and beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts who had been recently kidnapped in Libya. Dressed in Guantanamo-like orange jump suits, the Copts were lined up along a beach and abruptly beheaded by black-dressed *mujahedin*. The camera then focused of the sea water red with blood.

A *jihadist* commander dressed in military fatigues delivered the message in American-accented English. "All praise is due to Allah the strong and mighty," he declared at the start of the video. "And may blessings and peace be upon the ones sent by the sword as a mercy to all the worlds." He connected the "End-of-Time Battle" in al-Jazira with the decisive surge on Christendom to be launched from Libya.

"Oh people, recently you have seen us on the hills of ash-Sham and Dabiq's plain, chopping off the heads that have been carrying the cross for a long time, and today, we are on the south of Rome, on the land of Islam, Libya, sending another message.

"All Crusaders: safety for you will be only wishes especially if you are fighting us all together. Therefore we will fight you all together. The sea you have hidden *Sheikh* Osama bin Laden's body in, we swear to Allah, we will mix it with your blood."

After the *jihadist* leader finished his declaration, the line of *mujahedin* commenced the beheading of the 21 Copts kneeling in front of them. Once the slaughter was over, the commander stepped forward for a final statement. "And we will conquer Rome, by Allah's permission, the promise of our Prophet, peace be upon him," he declared.

The threat to Rome from the shores of the Caliphate's Libyan bastion was a stark reiteration of KHI's formal announcement of "The Final Crusade" against Rome and Europe as a whole. The cover story of the October 2014 issue of the KHI's *Dabiq Magazine* was called Reflections on the Final Crusade. "There is no escape from this divine decree. It must happen and it certainly will," *Dabiq* announced. Once Muslim forces consolidated their hold over the greater Middle East, "the bulk of all Jihad was against the cross-worshipping Romans with Sham playing an important role in all the wars between the Muslims and Crusaders." Rome, the article elaborates, "refers to the Christians of Europe and their colonies" wherever Muslims dwell. The KHI is very clear about the plans of the *jihadist* forces. "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women, by the permission of Allah, the Exalted. If we do not reach that time, then our children and grandchildren will reach it, and they will sell your sons as slaves at the slave market," the *Dabiq* promised. "Every Muslim should get out of his house, find a Crusader and kill him... And the Islamic State will remain until its banner flies over Rome." The KHI considers the struggle for Rome a turning point in the history of Islam's ascent to global power. "This battle ends the era of the Roman Christians ... and raise[s] the flag of the *Khilafah* over them."



## Conclusion

By early 2015, Libya no longer exists as a viable state – having morphed into a web of small fiefdoms fighting each other. Although the self-destruction and fracturing of Libya has been going on since early 2011, the territory of Libya is presently at a turning point. Sponsored by outside powers, the country's two political poles – the legal government of Abdullah al-Thinni now exiled to the Baida-Tobruk area in the east and the Libya Dawn [*Fajr Libya*] Islamist government of Omar al-Hassi in the Tripoli-Misurata area in the west – have now consolidated sufficient military power and allies to sustain and escalate the fratricidal fight for political power. The key to the ability of the Libya Dawn authorities to expand power is the building alliance and cooperation with the key sponsoring states – Iran, Sudan, Qatar and Turkey – and particularly their intelligence services. The crux of this alliance is the help provided by the sponsoring states to the Islamist-*jihadi*st forces in Libya in return for their help in using Libya as a springboard for *jihadi*st surge into western Africa and southern Europe.

The Libya Dawn government is based on an alliance of Islamist-*jihadi*st groups. The key formal elements are the *Ikhwan's* Justice and Construction Party, the al-Watan Party made of LIFG cadres, and numerous militias from Misurata. Other more sensitive entities, including *Ansar al-Sharia*, are staunch yet unacknowledged members of the Libya Dawn forces. Khalifa al-Ghwel, an engineer from Misurata who serves as the Libya Dawn's minister of defense, insists that the *jihadi*st forces must not be considered terrorists. "*Ansar al-Sharia* are not extremists," Ghwel stresses. "None of these groups ... are terrorists or extremists; they are revolutionaries." He considers the Libya Dawn forces to be "a coalition" comprised of "several moderate and hardline Islamist militias" whose loyalty to Hassi's Tripoli is ascertained because the entire force is led by "powerful brigades from Misurata." Ghwel estimates the Islamist forces to be 10,000-to-15,000 fighter-strong. With the new weapons and equipment arriving in Libya from and via the sponsoring states, Ghwel opines, the Libya Dawn forces will soon "reach the Egyptian border and control the entire country."

Starting early February 2015, Libya's internationally recognized government and the Egyptian government embarked on a joint effort to contain the *jihadi*st up-surge as the first step in a long and arduous road toward restoring Libya to functioning statehood.

Most significant was the decision of the foci of power in Baida-Tobruk to close ranks in order to better confront the Islamist-led government in Tripoli-Misurata. Consequently, Libya's legitimate PM Abdullah al-Thinni and the commander of the most powerful anti-*jihadi*st forces Major General Khalifa Haftar buried the hatchets and committed to jointly fighting Libya's enemies. On February 9, Haftar had the General Command of the Libyan Army formally announce that the military's "only mission is to fight terrorists and defeat the allies of extremist militias and gangsters, and not to intervene in politics." Haftar sought to assuage Thinni's concerns that he – Haftar – has political ambitions. "There are those who are trying to sow discord and division between the army and the government to confuse and stagger the general political and military landscape," the military's statement read. The High Command of the Libyan Army and all personnel are only "pursuing their mission in the fight against terrorism, the defeat [of] armed militias and gangs, and have nothing to do with political affairs."

On February 15, reacting to the release of the Libyan Caliphate's video, President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi announced that Cairo would choose the "necessary means and timing to avenge the criminal killings." Haftar immediately vowed to provide Egypt with all possible military support and cooperation in order to expedite the common war on *jihadi*st terrorism. "Libyans are helping the Egyptian Army to take revenge on these terrorist forces because Cairo is considered to be a Libyan city," Haftar told Egyptian TV. "We strongly support Egyptian military intervention to strike D'I'SH and other terrorist groups."



The Thinni administration is cognizant that a military escalation is now inevitable. On February 25, Thinni announced that Haftar will be appointed Libya's top military commander with the new rank of Field Marshall. The decision reflects the growing role and influence of the military in the official government in lieu of the escalation in the struggle for Libya's soul and future. On February 27, Thinni echoed Haftar's perception that the *jihadi* threat is becoming intolerable and that close military cooperation with Egypt is the key to Libya's salvation. Thinni called for military support for the Libyan forces in order to meet the growing threats. "DI'ISH is well-established in the region of Sirte and does not hide its presence in Tripoli. If [Libya's] troops are not provided with the weapons they need, the group will deploy throughout Libya," he warned. Thinni also called for new air strikes to be launched together with Egypt against *jihadi* forces and objectives before the *ihadists* "widen their presence" in and beyond Libya. Indeed, on Sisi's orders Egyptian forces are being mobilized and deployed westward in preparation for an escalation in the fight against Libya-origin *ihadism*. Cairo is convinced there is no escape from an all-out war on the Caliphate's strongholds in Libya.

Desperate to save his country, PM Abdullah al-Thinni traveled to Cairo and Moscow in quest for help. In Cairo, Thinni acknowledged that Libya's deteriorating security situation was adversely affecting the security of Egypt. He therefore welcomed President Sisi's call for an Arab force to confront *ihadist* terrorism in Libya. Thinni heads to Moscow for anti-terrorism talks at the Kremlin. Sisi encouraged Thinni, telling him that only the Russians are willing to actually help the anti-*ihadist* forces in Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Pointing out to Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to Cairo, Sisi stressed that Russia was the only "strategic friend" in the fight against *ihadism*. Sisi said that Putin and he agreed that conflicts around the world now threaten the "civilizational values" of all mankind. Hence, Sisi and Putin committed to adopting "common approaches focused on the need to confront these trends" and establishing "a more just world order." Putin told Sisi that "the challenge of terrorism that faces Egypt, and which Russia also faces, does not stop at any borders." Therefore, Putin and Sisi committed to "reinforcing our efforts in combating terrorism" wherever they might be. Furthering security in Libya, Sisi concluded, is an integral part of Russia's strategy to stabilize the eastern Mediterranean by empowering and cooperating with indigenous littoral forces. Thinni must ensure that Libya benefits from this strategy.

Meanwhile, Italy and the rest of Western Europe dread the threatened *ihadist* invasion of Rome. However, little is being done to help the Libyans. Official Rome has been urging NATO-led international action because Libya is now a "failed state." Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti announced that Italy was ready to lead a coalition against the Caliphate in Libya because "now an intervention has become urgent." However, Rome immediately faced a major backlash from a West still smarting over the disastrous NATO-led intervention of 2011. "It's not the time for a military intervention," Prime Minister Matteo Renzi conceded. "Our proposal is to wait for the UN Security Council. The strength of the UN is decidedly superior to that of the radical militias." Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni declared that "Italy will do everything to defend its security, counteracting this barbarism." He reiterated that "Italy is ready to do its part in Libya" but only after the UN had taken the initiative. "Right now, the game is international," he stated. Gentiloni noted that therefore "Libya must be a focus of NATO" rather than Ukraine. German Chancellor Angela Merkel concurs that NATO should focus on the threat from across the Mediterranean and defuse the needless crisis with Russia over Ukraine. However, the US keeps pushing for NATO to focus on Ukraine and a confrontation with Russia. The NATO quandary is further aggravated because the Obama Administration remains committed to the Islamists in Tripoli as part of the administration's preference for Ankara's regional hegemony and *ikhwan*-affiliated regimes in the new Middle East.



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Libya Now Assuming a Central Place in Islamic Caliphate Thrust  
Against Egypt, Maghrebi States, and Africa  
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Hence, barring the empowerment of, and support for, Libya's internationally recognized government in their desperate struggle against the rapidly growing state-sponsored Islamist-*jihadi*st menace – the *jihadi*st and their sponsoring states will soon transform Libya into their springboard for *jihadi*st surges into western Africa and southern Europe.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

### About the Author of this Issue

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