



Solving Libya's Crisis

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Executive Summary

- * Although the crisis in and around Libya has been escalating and spreading since 2011 - there is a sudden sense of urgency because of the flow of illegal migrants and Jihadist terrorists from Libya, as well as the lack of access to Libya's vast energy resources.
- * Time is of essence because the Jihadist elements are becoming stronger both in Libya and the extended regions so that their eradication is growing more challenging with every passing day.
- * Since the Jihadists are expanding, consolidating and thus unlikely to self-disarm - the destruction by force of the Jihadists should be considered an urgent imperative.
- * Foreign intervention is a non-option because it will both mobilize a majority of Libyans against the foreigners and reinforce the localized anti-state forces seeking to capitalize on any upheaval.
- * Hence, the only viable option is to empower a Libyan force to take on the Jihadists in Libya. The most logical are the armed forces of the internationally recognized government in Tobruk under the command of Marshal Khalifa Haftar.
- * The only way to put Libya on the right track is to empower Marshal Khalifa Haftar to defeat the Jihadists as the first step toward restoring stability and centralized civilian governance in Libya.

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Analysis

Once upon a time there was a state called Libya - a product of colonial era deals with straight lines on the map as borders.

It need not have been like this. The anti-Italian struggle of Omar Mukhtar at the beginning of the 20th Century launched a nascent national movement based on the Sanussia in Cyrenaica. In the aftermath of the Second World War, when the British granted the country independence in 1951, the Sanussia evolved from a political-religious Sufi order based in eastern Libya and northwestern Sudan into an aspirant all-Libyan political movement as its leader became King Idris of Libya. The Sanussi monarchy attempted to institutionalize the nascent state by introducing the Constitution of Libya in 1951, and amending it in 1961. The Sanussi monarchy was overthrown in September 1969 in a military coup that brought Muammar Qadhafi to power. In his 42 years in power, Qadhafi all but destroyed the notion of a Libyan state by playing tribes and extended families against each other. Whatever was left of Libya - that is, Qadhafi's Jamahiriya - was destroyed by the US-led Western military intervention of 2011. A myriad of sub-state foci of power - Islamist, Jihadist, criminal, ethnic, tribal, urban, monarchist and constitutionalist - established their own militias and embarked on a still escalating fratricidal carnage in order to pursue their respective parochial interests and attempt to grab more power and riches. A state in Libya is no more.

Having first hailed their military intervention as the harbinger of the new era of Responsibility to Protect doctrine - Obama and his acolytes quickly abandoned the land to its grim fate so as to not to have to face the horrific carnage they have wrought.

Libya could have been written off by the US-led West as yet another place of destitution and hopelessness to be forgotten and ignored had it not been for three key factors:

- The Jihadist build-up on the shores of the Mediterranean - a spitting distance from Italy they have sworn to invade on their way to the rest of Europe and the bastion for state-sponsored Jihadism from Syria-Iraq to Mauritania.
- The springboard for the predominantly Muslim migrants from the entire western Africa who cross the sea into Italy, Greece and the rest of Europe - bringing with them radicalization, criminality and Jihadism.
- The inordinate wealth of hydro-carbon reserves in the country and the waters off its coastline that Europe badly needs but cannot reach in lieu of the fratricidal carnage engulfing the land.

Hence, although the crisis in and around Libya has been escalating and spreading since 2011 - there is a sudden sense of urgency in European capitals. For several months now, the European foci of power have been increasingly concerned with the flow of illegal migrants and Jihadist terrorists from Libya, as well as with the lack of access to Libya's vast energy resources. Attempts at reaching political solutions, mainly via the UN such as the Skhirat process, have proven futile. The insistence of the Obama White House on an *Ikhwani*-dominated government in Tripoli has destroyed any incentive for the Islamist factions to compromise. Hence, the position of the European foci of power is that since the chaos in Libya will markedly escalate in coming months, and since the ensuing flow into Europe of both migrants and Jihadists will markedly increase - there can be no solution for the Libya threat other than a full scale invasion and occupation by NATO-led forces. Needless to



say that NATO's European members do not have the political will, military capabilities and economic capacity to undertake such an invasion. Moreover, Obama's Washington threatens to veto the idea.

Meanwhile, the Jihadist presence in Libya is immense and countrywide. Most notorious is the Jihadist threat from the Islamic State/Caliphate mainly in Sirte. The Islamic State/Caliphate is expanding eastward in the direction of Ajdabiya and the oil facilities of western Cyrenaica. Other Jihadist bastions are the Darna Emirate in eastern Cyrenaica and Jihadist pockets along the Tunisian border where they merge with the Jihadist emirate in southern Tunisia and into Algeria. There are Jihadist logistical and financial resources concentrated in the Sabha area that are pushing weapons and other supplies into the entire greater Middle East and western Africa. Of great importance is the training camps complex in the south - the so-called "Salvador Triangle" in the no-man's land formed by the borders of Libya, Algeria and Niger - that is affiliated with both al-Qaida and the Islamic State/Caliphate. The Jihadist factions also benefit from the major supply hub in and around Kufra that delivers people and materiel from Sudan.

In Fall 2015, the Islamic State/Caliphate established in the Sirte area a major headquarters and communication center for the "invasion of Europe" - more precisely, the export of Jihadist terrorism into Europe including the infiltration of operatives and experts among the multitude of the African destitute reaching the coast of Libya. Although the reports about the arrival of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were incorrect - several very senior commanders of the Islamic State/Caliphate did arrive in Sirte in October-November. Their presence testifies to the great importance given by the Jihadist uppermost leadership to the export of the Jihad across the Mediterranean and into Europe.

The Jihadist challenge in Libya is increasingly complex because it is not limited to the Islamic State/Caliphate. There are many political-military factions - mainly those led by veterans of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and other al-Qaida affiliates - that are currently affiliated with the *Ikhwan* in Tripolitania, and, to a lesser extent, in Cyrenaica and the Fezzan. These factions include major players such as *Fajr* Libya and lesser groups throughout Tripolitania - including in the power hubs in Misurata and Zintan. These entities depend on terrorism-sponsoring states such as Sudan, Qatar and Turkey, and are involved in the delivery of weapons and other supplies to allied Jihads in foreign lands such as Syria and Egypt. While they consider the Islamic State/Caliphate a major threat to their own political aspirations - these Islamist entities are not inclined to suppress, let alone destroy, the Islamist-Jihadist vast infrastructure.

Therefore, although "the international community" - that is, the US-led West operating under the banner of the UN - insists on the eradication of the Islamist-Jihadist "extremist forces" as an integral part of the consolidation of a national unity government in Libya as mediated in Skhirat and similar venues - key stakeholders in Libya are dead set against such crackdown because they need the Islamist-Jihadist backing. Even those Islamist elements - mainly locally-based foci of power and their leaders, as well as tribe and extended-family leaders in predominantly Islamist-Jihadist areas who do not support Jihadist terrorism and violence - are afraid of their own marginalization once the Islamist-Jihadist power bloc is removed, and therefore are disinclined to take chances such as supporting the eradication of local al-Qaida affiliates and even elements of the Islamic State/Caliphate.

Moreover, given the significant role and relative importance of *Ikhwani* and Islamist foci of power in the Tripolitania power tapestry, there exists a systemic across-the-board fear in official Tripoli that the purge of any Islamist-Jihadist elements in the context of establishing a national unity government will tilt the overall balance of power in favor of the monarchist- and constitutionalist-inclined Cyrenaica camp. This fear creates a



deadlock that paralyzes the possible implementation of any agreement between Tobruk and Tripoli on a future government no matter the specific phrasing and extent of UN commitment.

Simply put, no negotiations process will be able to eradicate these fears and thus put both genuine national reconciliation and government forming processes on an implementation track. It is imperative, therefore, to eradicate by force the Jihadist elements (as distinct from *Ikhwani* and other Islamist political elements) before a genuine all-Libyan political process can be attempted.

Time is of essence because the Jihadist elements are becoming stronger both in Libya and the extended regions so that their eradication is growing more challenging with every passing day. As well, their aggregate threat and harm to all - in and out of Libya - is markedly growing by inaction.

Since the Jihadists are expanding, consolidating and thus unlikely to self-disarm - the destruction by force of the Jihadists should be considered an urgent imperative. Such destruction by force is thus an unavoidable step on the way to national reconciliation and restoration of national governance in Libya.

Foreign intervention is a non-option because it will both mobilize a majority of Libyans against the foreigners and reinforce the localized anti-state forces seeking to capitalize on any upheaval. Ultimately, as proven in 2011 (and for that matter the Egyptian-Libyan border clashes of July 1977, the periodic French-sponsored Chad clashes between 1978 and 1987, and the US bombing of 1986) - the West does not know how to handle Libya because of its uniquely diverse populace thinly spread over a vast land. The Italian-driven plan to soon deploy some 6,000 NATO and allied troops to protect the oil fields of western Cyrenaica while launching air-strikes against the Sirte area Jihadist bastion might temporarily stall the advance of the Islamic State forces - but will also awaken a wide myriad of tribal, Islamist-Jihadist and other xenophobic forces that will further undermine any attempt to establish all-Libyan governance. Indeed, there is widespread recognition of this reality among the uppermost leaders in the West who are adamant in their opposition to any invasion or intervention.

Hence, the only viable option is to empower a Libyan force (with foreign help and supplies as need be) to take on the Jihadists in Libya. This force and its leaders should be beholden to a legitimate Libyan government or recognized political authorities. The most logical are the armed forces of the internationally recognized government in Tobruk under the command of Marshal Khalifa Haftar. On 2 March 2015, Haftar was nominated the Chief of Staff and commander of the internationally recognized Libyan Army and promoted to the rank of Marshal. Haftar was appointed by Aghila Saleh Issa, the then chairman of the internationally recognized House of Representatives in his capacity as mission commissioner of the Libyan Army's Chief of Staff. Haftar took the oath before parliament before assuming office. To-date, Haftar hasn't done anything to suggest challenge or even disrespect to civilian authorities.

Khalifa Haftar, 72, joined the Libyan Army under the Monarchy. He participated in the Qadhafi coup and was quickly assigned major tasks such as commanding the Libyan contingent in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. During the 1980's he held key command positions in Libya's forays into Chad. In 1987, he defected and formed a group of officers that attempted to overthrow Qadhafi with US and Western help. The attempt failed because of insufficient help from the US and France. Haftar received shelter in the US. In 2011, he rushed back to join the anti-Qadhafi forces. As commander of the new Libyan Army, Haftar led several operations on behalf of the legitimate authorities culminating in the 2014 campaign against the GNC and its Islamist allies that made it possible for national elections to take place. He moved with the internationally-recognized



government to Tobruk when the GNC refused to relinquish power after losing the elections. Even Haftar's foes acknowledge that he has "unrivalled military experience" in all of Libya.

There is no substitute for Libyans resolving Libya's problems and addressing its challenges. Foreign intervention is bound to fail. Therefore, the only way to put Libya on the right track is to empower Marshal Khalifa Haftar to consolidate by force government control over northern Libya (up-to the water crest of the Jabel Akhdar) as the first step toward restoring stability and centralized civilian governance in Libya. Given the socio-political character of Libya - the stabilization of the north will permit the establishment of a legitimate government, as well as the launching of national reconciliation and recovery. The pacification of the entire Libya will take longer time and must be based more on political negotiations than the use of force. The crucial importance of attaining stabilization and containing the Jihadists as advocated by Haftar has already been recognized by key regional stakeholders such as Cairo, Rabat, Athens and Rome.

The new Libya - whether a democracy or a constitutional monarchy - will need a strongman untainted by the post-Qadhafi convoluted politics in order to bring the endemic bickering and power-struggles to a speedy end. Such a strongman will essentially follow the precedents created by the immensely successful and popular President Abdel Fattah Sisi of Egypt. Having political aspirations, Haftar is cognizant of the demands of public office in the 21st Century. Haftar promised to take off his uniforms once he wins the military campaign and focus on being elected as Libya's civilian president. Haftar committed to the establishment of a civilian national unity government that will include politicians/leaders from Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Fezzan, the central and southern tribes, and the ethnic minorities. To guarantee popular legitimacy and support, the government will conduct free and fair elections as soon as humanly possible. Haftar is interested in rebuilding and developing Libya's economic infrastructure, and Beijing already expressed interest in leading such an undertaking.

Alas, Haftar requires tremendous amounts of multifaceted help before he can address these challenges. A failure to provide such help by the West will have the same tragic consequences as Haftar's original attempt to topple Qadhafi back in the late-1980's. Can the West afford a failure to both bring down the Islamic State/Caliphate and then stabilize Libya?

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



About the Author of this Issue

Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York Times No. 1 Bestseller & Washington Post No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (New York Times Bestseller & Foreign Affairs Magazine Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports.

Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



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