



Libya's Jihad

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Executive Summary

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First is the acceptance by the mainstream Jihadist trend of the theological priorities and themes set forth by the Islamic State/Caliphate. The 15 January 2016 Friday Sermon in al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem that addressed issues pertinent to the Libyan Jihad was a milestone in embracing the theology of the Islamic State/Caliphate.

Second is the unprecedented establishment in Libya of an Islamist-Jihadist force integration led by the Islamic State/Caliphate and involving all key movements including the Muslim Brothers (the Ikhwan), the Fajr Libia (Libya's Dawn), the Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaida-affiliates and a host of other smaller groups and militias. The Islamist-Jihadist groups already committed to obeying a unified Majlis Shurah that will set their strategy both against common enemies in Libya and adjacent countries, as well as in pursuit of common goals of Global Jihad mainly in Europe.

The all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger in Libya makes a mockery of the UN- and Western-sponsored Sisyphian negotiations in Skhirat, Morocco, to establish an all-Libyan national government. The desperate efforts to reconcile between the positions and objectives of the Libyan "governments" in Tripoli and Tobruk are meaningless considering the commitments made by the Islamist-Jihadist leaders of Tripoli to fight for an Islamist Libya jointly with the Islamic State/Caliphate.

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Analysis

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The unique and central role of Libya as a springboard and gateway to Rome (the Vatican) and the rest of Europe has been a major theme of the Islamic State/Caliphate since Autumn 2014. While most Jihadist theologians, and particularly these affiliated with al-Qaida's Shurah Kabirah, have repeatedly paid lip service to the ultimate imperative to occupy the West through Jihad – the operational emphasis focused on the role of "Lone Wolves" from among Europe's own Muslim communities rather than invasion from the Hub of Islam. In contrast, the Islamic State/Caliphate stresses the role of "Lone Wolves" strikes as an interim phase preparing the ground for the inevitable Jihadist invasion that will start from Rome.

At the beginning of 2016, a trickle of Jihadist theological documents and postings started raising the imperative to occupy and destroy Christian/Crusader Europe. For as long as Western forces can continue operating out of Europe, the new argument goes, there remained a major threat to the ability of the Islamists-Jihadists to consolidate their own entities throughout, and ultimately win over, the entire Hub of Islam.

On 15 January 2016, the extremely authoritative and influential Sheikh Abu Taqi al-Din al-Dari delivered the Friday Sermon in al-Aqsa Mosque. The title was revealing: "Jihad for the sake of Allah is the means sanctioned by the Sharia to carry the message of Islam to the entire world." He stressed that the only way Islam can gain and sustain power in the contemporary world is through the use of force. Therefore, the Muslim World must revisit the traditional teachings about a perpetual war between the Abode of Islam and the infidels' Abode of War. "With regard to the natural and original battles of the Muslims, (we say that) the relationship of the Abode of Islam with the abodes of the infidels is one of war. Therefore, the Islamic state must prepare and then act to annex those countries (to the Abode of Islam), and to impose its control and authority over those countries. If the (infidel) authorities and regimes refuse to allow the Islamic state to impose the rule and order



of Islam over their countries, they must pay the Jizya poll tax. If they refuse that too, they should be fought for the sake of Allah.”

Given the growing tension and spreading confrontation between the Muslim World and the West, Sheikh Abu Taqi al-Din al-Dari stressed, “the basic principle is that the Islamic state should work to conquer the world through Jihad for the sake of Allah.” Under contemporary conditions, this conquest campaign is the most accurate manifestation of the heritage and legacy of the righteous companions of Prophet Muhammad. “The purpose of Jihad for the sake of Allah is to make His word reign supreme, and to conquer the world. Thus, the Prophet’s companions roamed the planet Earth in order to conquer it. The Islamic State, which will be established soon, Allah willing, should do the same. It must conquer Rome, Washington and Paris, Allah willing, by means of Jihad for the sake of Allah, in order to remove oppression, and to purify the land from the filth of polytheism.” Thus, while Sheikh Abu Taqi al-Din al-Dari did not recognize the legitimacy of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s Islamic State/Caliphate – he endorsed and propagated Baghdadi’s core themes and messages on Jihad.

These endorsements are not theologically abstract. Rather, they reflect the slide of the Jihadist Trend into the fold of the Islamic State/Caliphate teachings. Thus, in early 2016, this endorsement permitted the drive for unity among the key players in Libya in pursuit of the springboard and gateway to Rome and the rest of Europe, as well as in defense of their vital interests - namely, controlling Libya.

In the second half of January 2016, Libya’s Islamists-Jihadists virtually completed what one leader called a “mega merger” of virtually all the major and minor entities. The discussions were initiated in early December 2015 by the senior-most leaders of the Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan) and the al-Qaida-affiliated Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) who were at the time part of the Tripoli Government. They reached out to senior leaders of the Islamic State/Caliphate, Fajr Libia, Ansar al-Sharia and other al-Qaida-affiliates with the offer to establish an “integrated unified Majlis Shurah” for all Islamists-Jihadists. Unity was imperative to ensuring their ability to guarantee the sustenance of an Islamist-Jihadist Libya while withstanding the UN and Western pressure to agree on a unity government for Libya.

By mid-January, the Islamist-Jihadist trend resolved to send a clear message to the West that any effort to establish a non-Islamist Libya was futile because “all the Islamist opposition elements speak in one voice and should be treated as such,” a senior Islamist leader in Tripoli explained. The Islamist parties also agreed to jointly run the territories that are already under Islamist control while seeking to expand their hold throughout Libya and North Africa. An al-Qaida-affiliated senior leader stressed that the Libyan unity agreement “would inspire Islamists in Algeria and Egypt to follow suit.”

On the part of most Jihadist leaders, and particularly these of the Islamic State/Caliphate, the agreement to participate in, and support, all-Libyan frameworks has been a significant pragmatic decision. In principle, the Islamic State/Caliphate and all other Islamist-Jihadist entities do not recognize the very existence of modern Libya as a viable unified political-geographic entity. The regional mapping introduced by the Islamic State/Caliphate is the most precise and explicit. According to their map, the western half of Libya belongs to al-Maghreb that stretches all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, and the eastern half to Bilad al-Kanana that stretches all the way to the Suez Canal. The border-line reaches the shores of the Gulf of Sidra to the east of the Sirte area. Therefore, the Islamic State/Caliphate and the other Islamist-Jihadist entities consider Libya the amalgam of three major wilayat - provinces - in and around Libya that comply with the overall division of the entire North Africa.



The Libyan part of Bilad al-Kanana is called Wilayat al-Barqa. Al-Barqa covers the Cyrenaica area all the way to the Ras Lanuf area in the west and all the way to east of Marsa Matruh (in Egypt) to the east. To the south, Wilayat al-Barqa stretches into the heart of Chad. Barqa is the name of the region during the beginning of the surge of Islam into the area. The Libyan part of al-Maghreb is divided into two provinces. To the north, between the shores of the Mediterranean and Jabel Akhdar, and from the border-line westward into Kabila, Algeria, stretches the Wilayat al-Tarabulus (Tripoli). With its capital in Sirte, Wilayat al-Tarabulus is considered the center of the Islamic State/Caliphate in contemporary Libya and the entire Maghreb. South of the mountains and into the rocky desert of Niger and eastern Algeria spreads Wilayat al-Fezzan. Fezzan means Hard Rock in the Berber language and is the historic name of the region.

However, the uppermost leadership of the Islamic State/Caliphate could not ignore the existence of a vibrant Islamist-Jihadist movement in modern Libya. Therefore, the leadership decided in Summer 2015 to recognize the existence of a Libya Province (Wilayat Libia) as a de-facto administrative entity for the consolidation of local Islamic State/Caliphate assets. Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani, a Sadui-born senior leader of African roots, was nominated in July 2015 as “the Amir delegated by the Khilafah for the Libyan Wilayat” – that is, the guide of, and adviser to, the Libyan Jihadist leaders. In August, shortly after al-Qahtani’s arriving in Libya, the Islamic State/Caliphate published an interview in Issue 11 of Dabiq in which he discussed the importance of Libya and the situation in the country.

Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani stressed the importance of Libya to the all-Islamic effort. “Libya has a great importance for the Muslim Ummah because it is in Africa and south of Europe. It also contains a well of resources that cannot dry. All Muslims have a right to these resources. It is also a gate to the African desert stretching to a number of African countries. It is important to note also that the Libyan resources are a concern for the kafir West due to their reliance upon Libya for a number of years especially with regards to oil and gas. The control of the Islamic State over this region will lead to economic breakdowns especially for Italy and the rest of the European states.” Therefore, it is imperative for the Islamic State/Caliphate as the true representative of the Islamist-Jihadist trend to secure its hold over Libya and bring the reconcileable local forces under its banner.

Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani surveyed the various forces operating in Libya and defined the prospects for cooperation with the Islamic State/Caliphate. He harshly criticized the main armed formations of the Islamist-Jihadist movement because of their willingness to support the government in Tripoli. At the same time, he extended an olive branch should they decide to correct their ways. “The ‘Libyan Dawn’ is the official military wing for the ‘General National Congress’ democratic government (with its ‘Islamic’ shroud) represented by the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ and the ‘Libyan Islamic Fighting Group’ led by Abdul Hakim Belhadj. ... They will continue to be a target for our swords, which we will not hold back until they repent from their kufr and their wala’ to Allah’s enemies from amongst the crusaders and the secularists.” In contrast, and for a good reason, Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani had great hopes for the Ansar al-Sharia despite their long association with al-Qaida. “Many of the leaders and soldiers of Ansar al-Sharia were from the first to pledge bay’ah in Libya to the Islamic State,” he explained.

Thus, in mid-January 2016, cognizant of the growing threat, virtually all the Islamist and Jihadist entities in the greater Libya committed to an unprecedented unity of effort against the West and the UN-sponsored government. The predominance of the Islamic State/Caliphate in this alliance means that there can be no rapprochement, or even co-existence, between this “mega merger” and a modern Libyan state no matter how many UN-sponsored and Western-endorsed agreements are signed.



Significantly, the initial contemplation of an all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger originated from the ranks of the Muslim Brothers and the al-Qaida-affiliated LIFG - that is, participants in the Tripoli Government who are supported by the Obama White House. Having been exposed to the intricacies of the Skhirat negotiations and other UN- and Western-sponsored venues of negotiations regarding the future government of Libya, they quickly realized that they would lose their hold onto power once a national reconciliation government is established.

Moreover, these Islamist-Jihadist leaders were cognizant that no future US administration would be as committed to an Ikhwan-based government as the Obama White House. Only the Obama White House has been ready repeatedly to pressure, cajole, and even coerce their Western allies to accept an Islamist Tripoli, as well as protect the blatant intervention of Turkey, Qatar, the UAE and Sudan in support for the Libyan Islamists-Jihadists. Hence, the Islamist-Jihadist leaders deemed it urgent imperative to consolidate an irreversible Ikhwan-based government in Tripoli before the US presidential elections take place in November 2016.

The driving force behind the initiative was the uppermost leadership of the Muslim Brothers (the Ikhwan) in both Libya and the Persian Gulf. The key facilitator was Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Salabi (born in Benghazi in 1963) who is considered the leader of the Libyan Ikhwan. A close protégé of the venerable Sheikh Yussuf al-Qaradawi, Dr. al-Salabi is by far the most authoritative Islamist leader in Libya. He is also a leading expert on the history of early Muslim leaders whose works have been frequently cited by luminaries of the Islamic State/Caliphate as they have sought to define the resurrection of the reign of the first four Pious Caliphs in the 21st Century. Back in 2010, Dr. al-Salabi played a major role in the negotiations with Sayf al-Islam Qadhafi of the amnesty that freed all the key Jihadist leaders then in Libyan jails. Since 2011, he has been shuttling between Libya and Qatar – contributing to the consolidation of Jihadist militias. For example, in mid-2012, he was empowered by the Qataris to dispense over \$2billion in cash at his discretion to such Jihadist entities as the February 17 Martyrs Brigade, Ansar al-Sharia and other al-Qaida-affiliates. Subsequently, Dr. al-Salabi was instrumental in establishing and legitimizing the Islamist government in Tripoli and the ensuing undermining of all efforts to establish a nationalist government in Libya in Spring 2014 despite elections and international agreements.

Once he committed to the all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger, Dr. al-Salabi first brought in the leadership of the LIFG – the pillars of the Jihadist power in Tripoli and the entire Libya. Prominent Jihadist leaders have rallied to supporting Dr. al-Salabi. Among them are the most powerful and influential: Abdul Hakim Belhadj (the former LIFG commander and by the most powerful Islamist-Jihadist leader in Libya), Khalid al-Sharif (the founder of the National Guards and the Deputy Minister for Borders and Protection of Key Facilities), Abdul Wahab al-Qaid (of the LIFG Majlis Shurah), and Mahdi al-Harati (the Deputy Chief of the Tripoli Military Council). Their endorsement of the all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance – initially among al-Qaida-affiliates and subsequently also with the Islamic State/Caliphate – ensured the success of the initiative. Indeed, the LIFG veteran leaders conducted numerous consultations with Islamist-Jihadist luminaries in Libya and throughout the Middle East that sealed the agreement.

Initially, the Ikhwan and the LIFG sought to recreate on a far larger scale the establishment of Fajr Libia under Qatari and Turkish patronage, as well as the explicit encouragement of the Obama White House. Ultimately, Fajr Libia succeeded to prevent the establishment of a nationalist government in Libya in Spring 2014 and went on to block General Khalifa Haftar's "Operation Dignity" launched in mid-May 2014 in order to secure the democratically elected nationalist forces.



Fajr Libia first brought together all the key Islamist-Jihadist militias and entities operating in western Libya in Spring-Summer 2014. Most important were the Libyan Shield Militia (an Ikhwan-affiliated force in Misrata, Benghazi, Khoms, and Tripoli then under the command of Omar al-Mukhtar al-Madhuni); the Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room (allied with the Ikhwan); the Tripoli Brigade (Abdul Hakim Belhadj's own force operating in Tripoli and western Libya); and the Allies' Front (operating in Benghazi). Subsequently, Fajr Libia expanded to Cyrenaica when the Majlis Shurah of the Benghazi Revolutionaries requested to join the Fajr Libia. The Majlis Shurah was also a coalition of Jihadist entities that was tailored after the early version of Fajr Libia. Among the key members were the Libya Shield 1 (Ikhwan-affiliate allied with the al-Qaida-affiliate Ansar al-Sharia); the February 17 Martyrs Brigade; and the Rafallah Sahati Brigade (another ally of the Ansar al-Sharia under the command of Ismail al-Salabi - the brother of Ali al-Salabi - who spent time in jail with two brothers of Belhadj).

However, in late-2015, the main issue was relations/cooperation with the Islamic State/Caliphate – the mightiest Jihadist force in Libya and the Maghreb. Although there existed a profound theological-ideological disputes between the Ikhwan/al-Qaida school of Jihad and the Islamic State/Caliphate – it was clear to all that it was impossible for the Tripoli Islamist-Jihadist power-base to either confront or ignore the Islamic State/Caliphate.

By December 2015, there were already many cases of localized alliances between local Jihadist commanders – mainly from Ansar al-Sharia – and their Islamic State/Caliphate counterparts. Back in April 2015, a senior Ansar al-Sharia commander in Benghazi called Abu Abdallah al-Libi put his entire force under the banner of the Islamic State/Caliphate and swore allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Al-Libi is a most influential commander and theological authority among the Jihadists of Benghazi and western Cyrenaica. He now serves as a Sharia Judge in the Islamic court of Benghazi where he issues Fatwas in support of the Caliphate. Subsequently, numerous commanders and units of Ansar al-Sharia, including the entire Sirte and Misrata area, and also Fajr Libia joined the Islamic State/Caliphate on the basis of al-Libi's Fatwas.

In late-July 2015, al-Baghdadi dispatched to Benghazi six senior commanders from Syria-Iraq in order to help consolidate the Jihadist infrastructure of Wilayat al-Barqa and subsequently the entire war effort in Libya. Most important is Abdul-Hamid al-Qasemi. He is Saudi-born who has spent a lot of time in Darna. He is considered an expert on Libya and authored several works on the fighting and the key foci of power in the country. He also defined the policy toward the Fajr Libia. The key military expert dispatched by al-Baghdadi is Abu Ali al-Anbari - a former senior officer of the Iraqi Army. He arrived at Sirte by ship that was carrying specialized equipment and supplies.

Another key commander is the Bahraini Turki al-Bin Ali (aka al-Binali, Abu Sufyan al-Silmi, Abu Hudheifa al-Bahraini and Abu Hammam al-Athari). He first arrived in Libya in October 2013 to organize clandestine networks in the Sirte area. Soon afterwards, he returned to Syria in and fought in the central and northern fronts. He returned to Sirte in August 2015 and assumed a central command position. Sayf Abdullah Bin Hussein (aka Abu Ayadh al-Tunisi) is a Tunisian-born commander in Ansar al-Sharia who was among the first to join the Islamic State/Caliphate in Tunisia. In July-August 2015, he arrived in Sirte and then proceeded to Misrata where he has been organizing the local forces affiliated with the Islamic State/Caliphate. Other senior commanders include Abu Sayyaf al-Ansari and Abu Talha al-Tunisi who organize and help lead the Jihadist forces in Wilayat al-Tarabulus. In mid-January 2016, they oversaw the opening of numerous training bases in the Benghazi area preparing Jihadists for the Jihad for both Libya and Egypt, as well as the invasion of southern Europe.

The real political challenge, though, was in the Tripoli area where the Islamist-Jihadist leaders were apprehensive that the Islamic State/Caliphate might utilize its Wilayat al-Tarabulus in order to seize power. To ally these



fears, al-Baghdadi dispatched in early-December 2015 a senior emissary using the name Sufian al-Ghazali. Sufian al-Ghazali is a senior operative and veteran of sensitive operations in Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria first on behalf of al-Qaidat Jihad in the Islamic Maghreb and, since late Summer 2014, the Islamic State/Caliphate. Significantly, back in 2011-12, he played a major role in establishing the Jihadist support system in eastern Algeria and northern Tunisia that sponsored and sustained the myriad of Jihadist forces in western Libya and the Tripoli area, and ultimately their occupation of Tripoli and toppling of Muammar Qadhafi. Hence, Sufian al-Ghazali is known to the Libyan senior commanders as a loyal friend and a man of integrity.

Upon his arrival in western Libya, Sufian al-Ghazali reached out to Muhammad al-Madhuni – the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in western Libya. Muhammad al-Madhuni is the brother of Omar al-Mukhtar al-Madhuni – the former commander of the Shield Libya Western Brigade who played a crucial role in the creation of Fajr Libia and who was killed in inner-militia clashes in late-2014. Muhammad al-Madhuni received Sufian al-Ghazali in his bastion in the town of Sabratha on the Mediterranean coast about 40 miles west of Tripoli. They conducted lengthy discussions about Baghdadi's vision of, and plans for, Libya and the entire Maghreb.

Convinced that the Islamic State/Caliphate would indeed respect its other Islamist-Jihadist partners in a unified Majlis Shurah, Muhammad al-Madhuni organized a series of crucial meetings for himself and Sufian al-Ghazali with the uppermost Islamist-Jihadist leaders in Tripoli. The meetings took place in the fortified compound of Muammar Qadhafi in the Ameitiqh area (near the airport in Tripoli). Sufian al-Ghazali convinced them of al-Baghdadi's sincerity and commitment to the all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger. He assured the Libyan leaders that the Islamic State/Caliphate does not expect oath of allegiance to al-Baghdadi as a precondition for alliance and partnership with the other Libyan Jihadist entities. Moreover, all the foreign Jihadists affiliated with the Islamic State/Caliphate in Libya will also abide by the resolutions of the unified Majlis Shurah. Guaranteeing Islamist-Jihadist rule and preventing the establishment of a Western-sponsored nationalist government supersede all other considerations, Sufian al-Ghazali assured his interlocutors. They were convinced and in mid-January 2016 started the formation of the unified Majlis Shurah of Libya.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the leadership of the Islamic State/Caliphate moved quickly to start implementing the agreement reached by Sufian al-Ghazali. The Islamic State/Caliphate will lead the organization and build-up of the Jihadist forces throughout Libya to both consolidate an Islamist Libya and withstand Western/NATO threats. Umar al-Shishani (real name Tarkhan Batirashivli, a Chechen from Georgia's Pankisi Gorge), the Caliphate's best military commander and direct commander of the Special Forces Military Unit of Foreign Fighters, was dispatched to Sirte in early February 2016. According to a French Jihadist who served under Shishani, "he is not an ideologue. Rather, he is a fantastic strategist, able to lead battles with a rare audacity and intelligence." Significantly, on behalf of al-Baghdadi, Umar al-Shishani also runs "the parallel command structure" that operates outside the jurisdiction of the Shura Councils – nominally the Caliphate's highest decision-making body. In this capacity, Umar al-Shishani is in control of the "ahl al-hall wa'l-aqd" (The People Who Loosen and Bind) – the innermost security and intelligence clandestine cadres of the Caliphate whose name is based on the fiercest Jihadist forces during medieval Islam.

Umar al-Shishani arrived in Sirte with a small group of senior commanders, as well as hand-picked detachments of special forces and security/intelligence operatives (many of them Chechens and Europeans). His tasks are to organize the main military forces of the Islamic State/Caliphate – over 6,500-fighter strong in mid-February – into a potent offensive force capable of seizing and holding Libya's hydro-carbon infrastructure. This Sirte-based force will evolve into the hard-core of a far larger all-Libyan Jihadist force that will be comprised of the



other Islamist-Jihadist militias and armed groups as per the merger agreement. Meanwhile, Shishani's special forces and intelligence operatives are tasked with both guaranteeing the preeminence of the Islamic State/Caliphate through the purging of all hostile and threatening leaders, and the escalation of the long-range Jihadist spectacular strikes into both Europe and Africa. Thus, by dispatching Umar al-Shishani and his team, al-Baghdadi makes clear that the Islamic State/Caliphate is determined to secure the Islamist-Jihadist hold onto Libya and markedly escalate the Jihad into southern Europe, the entire Maghreb and western Africa.

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With the visit of Sufian al-Ghazali a historic threshold has been crossed. The Ikhwan-affiliated traditional Islamists-Jihadists agreed to join hands with the Islamic State/Caliphate against common foes. With this, the mutual quest for an Islamic Libya takes precedence over the negotiations on an all-Libyan nationalist government. Thus, the drive for the unification of the various Islamist-Jihadist movements is a process evolving in parallel with the mounting Western and UN pressure on Tobruk and Tripoli to establish a national unity government. Ultimately, the preeminence of the Islamic State/Caliphate in the merger process also means the adoption of the maximalist doctrine to both expand the Jihad to adjacent states, and to launch an invasion of Europe starting with Italy just across the Mediterranean.

The UN-sponsored Skhirat agreement naively expects that most of the Islamist-Jihadist foci of power will be voluntarily integrated into the new national power structure – that is, give up on their core objective to establish an Islamic State on the altar of accepting the outcome of elections and legislation that traditional Islam has long deemed un-Islamic and thus forbidden. Although al-Qaida scholars close to Ayman al-Zawahiri recently sanctified interim compromises with existing political establishments in pursuit of the ultimate Islamic State – there is no evidence that the majority of Libya's Islamist theologians and military leaders have accepted these ideas. On the contrary, Dr. Ali Muhammad al-Salabi and other Ikhwan-affiliated leaders have repeatedly reiterated their unwavering commitment to establishing an Islamic Libya at all cost. It is impossible for the Tripoli government to go around these Islamist luminaries and reach a genuine compromise with the Tobruk government on a nationalist compromise government.

As well, the UN-sponsored negotiations process anticipates the defusing of the Islamic State/Caliphate, mainly in the Sirte area, through negotiations rather than the use of force (if only because Libya's formal military forces are presently incapable of confronting the Jihadists). The UN anticipates a prolonged (several years long) rebuilding of a new national Libyan army before it would be possible to take on Sirte – assuming, of course, that the Jihadists will not preempt and set the country and region aflame long before their foes have completed their military build-up.

Meanwhile, the Jihadist front continues to evolve. The West has been focusing on to two major undertakings by the Islamic State/Caliphate – the related threats to Rome and Europe (aggravated by the flow of migrants sent from Libya across the Mediterranean), and the escalating and expanding assaults on the remaining elements of the Libyan hydro-carbon infrastructure. But there is another major aspect of greater importance in the long-term – namely, the expanding web of alliances with other Jihadist factions and entities throughout Libya and adjacent areas from Morocco to Egypt, as well as throughout the entire Sahel and Gulf of Guinea littoral to the south. These undertakings make the Islamic State/Caliphate the leading force in the all-Islamist-Jihadist quest for establishing an Islamic State throughout the entire Maghreb and western Africa. In the process, the Islamic State/Caliphate will assume prominence at the expense of both indigenous Islamists-Jihadists and al-Qaida-affiliated veteran entities (some going back to the 1980's).



In early 2016, the Jihadist invasion of Europe has become a prominent goal of the entire Jihadist movement – not just the Baghdadi Caliphate – as reflected in the sermon of Sheikh Abu Taqi al-Din al-Dari, the highly respected Imam of al-Aqsa and a prominent voice of “mainstream Islamism-Jihadism”. Yet, the Islamic State/Caliphate remains the undisputed driving force behind this endeavor on account of the large network of dedicated training camps and facilities established in Libya. The training infrastructure trains Libyans – both children and adults – as well as a wide variety of foreign mujahedin from Africa and the Arab world. Most of these camps are in the greater Sirte area.

In Autumn 2015, the Islamic State/Caliphate stated expanding the major training camp for Libyan and African fighters in Nawfaliyah (near Sirte). A special section dedicated to advance sabotage training for Boko Haram and other sub-Saharan African mujahedin so that they can strike important military and economic infrastructure was activated in early January. Another major undertaking is the Osama bin Zayd camp in the area of al-Zahir (east of Sirte) that is optimized for the training of children – the Lion Cubs of the Caliphate – from Sirte, Ajdabiya, Nawfaliyah, Bani Walid and Misrata. The first course of 85 Cubs graduated in early December. A new center dedicated for training Arab Jihadists was opened near as-Sawawa (east of Sirte) in early November. The camp is under the command of a HAMAS commander from Gaza going by the name of Abu al-Ghaddan and an Iraqi going by the names Jassem Mahmoud and Abu Amd al-Tikriti. Their focus is on training Jihadists for the Cairo area and the northern Sinai Peninsula. In early December, the largest training facility in the al-Zahir area was the al-Muhajireen Camp. This is a dedicated facility for the advance training of Jihadists earmarked for sensitive operations in Europe.

In addition, the Islamic State/Caliphate is running at least ten more training camps in the greater Sirte area. In the al-Zahir area, there are the al-Farouq Omar Camp, the al-Tawhid Camp, and the Aswad al-Khilafah Camp. In the al-Saba area, there are the al-Raya Camp, the Dhat al-Sawari Camp, the al-Fatiheen Camp (dedicated to urban warfare and seizing hotels, etc.), and the Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Camp (where mid- and high-ranking commanders are being trained). A large training camp – the al-Aadiat Camp – is located in the al-Aqwas area. The Abu Daud al-Jazrawi Camp located in a former air defense base specializes in anti-aircraft weapons. Reportedly, there is a closed section where trainees “fly” simulators in preparations for 9/11-type operations. Of growing importance is the al-Rawasi Camp in the marine point of al-Zaafran. There, the Islamic State/Caliphate has started building its naval forces – mainly navigating migrant boats across the Mediterranean into Italy and operating martyrdom boat-bombs to be used against cruise liners, container ships, and oil/gas rigs. As well, the Islamic State/Caliphate is trying to acquire anti-ship missiles from the HAMAS.

Hence, there might not be an escape from a Western/NATO military intervention against the Jihadist forces in Libya. However, NATO's European members do not have the political will, military capabilities and economic capacity to undertake such an intervention/invasion. Hence, should there be a Western/NATO intervention/invasion – it will be limited to Special Forces operations and aerial bombing tailored after the futile US-led campaign in Syria-Iraq. Military operations will be limited to striking Jihadist camps and securing the main hydro-carbon facilities against sabotage. Meanwhile, Libya will be set aflame by the growing Jihadist presence. Any Western intervention will also awaken a wide myriad of tribal, clan and other xenophobic forces that will rally to the banner of Omar Mukhtar and the rejection of all outside interventions. Thus, although the Western focus is on the Sirte Emirate of the Islamic State/Caliphate – the Islamist-Jihadist threat is far greater and includes the foci of power in Darna and Benghazi (Cyrenaica), Tripoli, Misrata, Sabratha and the Tunisian border (Tripolitania), and all over southern Libya. They will set the entire region aflame – and these flames will quickly cross the Mediterranean into Europe.



There is no substitute for having Libyans resolve Libya's problems and addressing its challenges. Foreign intervention is bound to fail. For as long as the Islamists of Tripoli continue to adhere to the all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger with the Islamic State/Caliphate – the UN-sponsored Skhirat negotiations will not yield a viable all-Libyan Government capable of controlling its own territory. Therefore, the only way to put Libya on the right track is to empower Marshal Khalifa Haftar to consolidate by force control over northern Libya (up-to the water crest of the Jabel Akhdar) as the first steps 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 Islamic State/Caliphate dreads this option. There can be no compromise with the forces of the Libyan National Army under Haftar, Abul-Mughirah al-Qahtani stressed in his Dabiq interview. "We have a number of fronts against the taghut [traitor to the creed] Haftar, who is the head of the Libyan army under the Tobruk government in East Libya. ... The secularist forces of Haftar are targets for the Khilafah soldiers wherever these forces might rest. We will not slack in fighting them until there is no more fitnah and the religion is all for Allah." Given the profound transformation of Libya achieved through the all-Islamist-Jihadist alliance or merger – the mere dread of Haftar by the Islamic State/Caliphate as their main nemesis should embolden the West to support his endeavor liberate his country and destroy the Jihadist forces.

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



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