

# American Foreign Policy Council

## LIBYA

### QUICK FACTS

Population: 6,541,948 (July 2015 est.)

Area: 1,759,540 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Berber and Arab 97%, other 3% (includes Greeks, Maltese, Italians, Egyptians, Pakistanis, Turks, Indians, and Tunisians)

Religions: Muslim (official; virtually all Sunni) 96.6%, Christian 2.7%

Government Type: In transition

GDP (official exchange rate): \$39.39 billion (2015 est.)

*Map and Quick Facts courtesy of the CIA World Factbook (January 2017)*

### OVERVIEW

*Since the ouster of longtime dictator Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, small contingents of local jihadists, militias, renegade generals, and secular forces have been battling for control of Libya. On the whole, Libyans have rejected extreme ideologies. In the country's 2014 parliamentary elections, a coalition of moderate parties emerged victorious while the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood had a poor showing compared to its brethren in Egypt and Tunisia. Further, candidates from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which took part in the election, did not garner any popular support. It is likely, though, that as public debate—which was completely snuffed out by Qaddafi's repressive policies—opens further in Libya, Islamists will have an opportunity to gain more of a following. Several jihadist groups, including Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS/ISIL) have contributed to the violence and instability in Libya, as the country's civil war continues. Despite a U.S. air campaign and the successes of pro-government militias, these Islamist groups remain formidable destabilizing forces in the country.*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Libya declared itself a constitutional monarchy under King Idris in 1951, after it won its independence from Italy in the aftermath of World War II. In September 1969, Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi staged a military *coup d'état*, after which he established an Arab nationalist regime that adhered to an ideology of “Islamic socialism.” Before long, Qaddafi’s authoritarian regime began to generate resentment among Islamist groups, leading to an Islamist revival beginning in the late 1970s. Yet the Qaddafi regime also supported terrorist activities abroad that included the downing of two airliners and a discotheque bombing in Berlin.

When the Arab Spring began in several Middle Eastern and North African countries in late 2010 (reaching Libyan cities in 2011), Qaddafi responded with a brutal crackdown on protesters. The response from the populace ignited a fierce civil war that lasted until mid-2011, when the Qaddafi regime was toppled. The resulting power vacuum invited chronic instability as various groups, both Islamist and secular, vied for power and influence, with no single group able to exert full control. In the interim, Libya’s government struggled to maintain order and rebuild state institutions, witnessing a rise in the presence and power of militias and other non-state actors.

In February 2014, retired General Khalifa Haftar, a former Qaddafi loyalist, began “Operation Dignity” with a sizable military force, attacking Islamist militant groups and targeting terrorists. To counter Haftar’s movement, an alliance of Islamist militias launched “Operation Dawn” in August 2014, seizing the Tripoli airport and other parts of the capital. Since then, outside actors such as the United Arab Emirates have thrown their support behind Haftar in the form of airstrikes.

### *The Muslim Brotherhood*

The origins of the Muslim Brotherhood date back to Egypt in the 1920s, but the organization would not make its first appearance in Libya until 1949, when a number of its members fled political persecution in Cairo and were granted refuge in Benghazi by King Idris.<sup>1</sup> The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (LMB) thus began as a branch of the original Egyptian organization. The LMB was founded by Egyptian cleric Ezadine Ibrahim Mustafa and several other refugees. Under King Idris, the group and its leaders were allowed relative freedom to spread their ideology. The LMB attracted local adherents and continued to gain support via other Egyptian leaders working in Libya.

This changed when Colonel Muammar Qaddafi came to power in 1969. Viewing the Brotherhood as a potential source of opposition, Qaddafi promptly arrested a number of the Brothers and repatriated them back to Egypt.<sup>2</sup> The crackdown continued until 1973, when members of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood were arrested by security services and, under torture, agreed to dissolve the organization -- effectively silencing themselves for the remainder of the 1970s.

However, in the early 1980s, the Brotherhood (which by then had renamed itself the “Libyan Islamic Group” or *al-Jama’at al-Islamiyya al-Libiyya*) revived its aspirations to replace the existing secular regime with sharia law through peaceful means. Once again, it began accumulating popular support, including from Libyan students who returned from the UK and U.S. after making contact with LMB members who had fled earlier repression. Through these contacts, the new generation was exposed to a plethora of Islamist ideas. The students took an active role in helping to spread the Brotherhood’s ideology, joining the movement’s covertly operated groups of inter-linked cells active throughout the country.<sup>3</sup>

The group drew much of its popular appeal through the charitable and welfare work of its members. These programs were particularly successful at attracting members of Libya’s middle class to join the LMB. The group’s programs were particularly strong in the eastern area of Benghazi, where the main tribes had traditionally opposed Qaddafi’s rule.<sup>4</sup> The regime, however, continued to take an uncompromising stance toward the LMB, persecuting most of its members, and publicly executing some. By the mid-1980s, the majority of LMB members who remained in Libya were either imprisoned or executed.<sup>5</sup>

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood returned to the scene in 1999 through dialogue with the Qaddafi regime. The talks gained momentum in 2005-2006 when Muammar Qaddafi’s son, Sayf al-Islam, personally worked to advance the dialogue in an effort to co-opt and neutralize opposition groups. These efforts focused in particular on Islamist groups, such as the Brotherhood. By the eve of the Libyan uprising in the spring of 2011, it was estimated that the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood had roughly one thousand members within Libya, and two hundred more in exile.<sup>6</sup>

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood has lost popularity in recent years. This decline first manifested itself after a poor showing in the 2012 parliamentary elections that followed Qaddafi’s ouster, which is especially noteworthy considering the political success of its counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia during the same timeframe.<sup>7</sup> The setbacks suffered by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood after its electoral success, including the deposing of the Brotherhood-backed president, Mohamed Morsi, in 2013, seems to have encouraged rather than placated anti-Brotherhood activists in Libya. The downward trend continued in the 2014 parliamentary elections, with the Muslim Brotherhood only able to secure 25 of the 200 available seats in the country’s legislature.<sup>8</sup> The outright rejection of the movement might be seen as part of the legacy of Qaddafi’s opposition to, and demonization of, the party. In some cases, resentment toward the Brotherhood stems from perceptions that it is inherently anti-democratic, or due to associations between the Brotherhood and more radical groups like al-Qaeda or *Ansar al-Sharia*.<sup>9</sup>

### *Tablighi Jama’at*

The number of *Tablighi* supporters in Libya today is relatively small, and there is only one known *Tablighi* center in the country.<sup>10</sup> The *Tablighi Jama’at*, however, distanced itself from politics after many of the organization’s members were arrested

in the 1980s, and were subsequently co-opted by the regime.<sup>11</sup> However, *Tablighi Jama'at* is pursuing active *dawa* (proselytization) campaigns in Libya, which receive significant communal support. In a lecture hosted on *Tablighi Jama'at's* official website, Muhammad Jihani, also known as Sheikh Jihani, gave a short lecture, posted in June of 2016, in which he described traveling to Libya. He claimed that all Libyans knew of *Tablighi Jama'at's* efforts at *dawa* in the United Kingdom, and that the minister of religion invited Jihani to his ministry, and offered Jihani any and all help that he might need.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*

The roots of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group can be found in an underground *jihadi* movement formed in 1982 by Iwad al-Zawawi. However, the LIFG did not officially announce its formation until 1995.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood, the LIFG advocated for military operations against the regime, seeking to overthrow Qaddafi and plotting attacks against other senior figures in the government. After failed attempts to overthrow the regime in 1986, 1987, and 1989, authorities arrested many of its rebels, including al-Zawawi himself.<sup>14</sup> Many of those who were not captured fled to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Many LIFG members seized the opportunity to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s. There, they and other Libyans set up their own military training camps. At times, LIFG members received instruction from members of al-Qaeda.<sup>15</sup> In addition to military training, the Libyan recruits were indoctrinated by influential *jihadi* clerics such as Abdullah Azzam.<sup>16</sup> While in exile in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the movement began to form into an identifiable organization.

Following the anti-Soviet Afghan *jihad*, Libyan LIFG members either returned home to establish cells, moved to Sudan to establish a base of operations to plan the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime, or moved to London to obtain logistical and financial support. Contrary to popular belief, however, the LIFG's interlude in Sudan was not predicated on the plans of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. According to Noman Benotman, a senior leader and member of the group's *shura* council, the LIFG staked out Sudan as a potential base following the Afghan *jihad* in 1988-1989, deciding it was appropriate to move closer to the Libyan front in 1993.<sup>17</sup> It was from Sudan that they sent delegations to Algeria to continue training.

Under the leadership of Commander Abu Abdullah al-Sadek, the LIFG worked to establish its structure and develop the leadership skills of cell leaders throughout the country.<sup>18</sup> LIFG leaders were forced to accelerate their plan in 1995 due to poor operational security. When members of the LIFG extracted one of their comrades from a hospital in Benghazi, Libyan security became aware of the operation and quickly moved to suppress the group. As a result, the LIFG was compelled to officially announce itself for the first time in October 1995.<sup>19</sup>

After the incident at the hospital, the Qaddafi regime asked, and eventually convinced, the Sudanese regime to eject the LIFG from Sudan. As a result, many LIFG

members returned to Libya, while others escaped to London. Once the LIFG was exposed, the group sprang into action and throughout the 1990s conducted military operations against the Libyan regime, including several failed attempts to assassinate Qaddafi himself. The Libyan regime fought relentlessly against the LIFG, killing Salah Fathi bin Sulayman (a.k.a. Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Khattab), one of the group's founding fathers, in a battle with Libyan soldiers near Darnah in September 1997.<sup>20</sup>

By 1998, the LIFG's insurgency and terrorist campaign within Libya had, by all measurable standards, come to a halt. However, the group did not declare an official ceasefire until 2000.<sup>21</sup> Following the campaign, many members were imprisoned in Libya. Many of those who escaped returned to Afghanistan. Among those who fled were the LIFG's *emir*, Abu 'Abd Allah al-Sadiq, chief religious official Abu al-Mundhir al-Sa'idi, and Abu Anas al-Libi, who had been recently implicated in the 1998 Embassy bombings.<sup>22</sup>

By 2005, the Libyan regime began a reconciliation and de-radicalization process at the prompting of Qaddafi's son, Sayf al-Islam.<sup>23</sup> After years of negotiations, in September 2009 LIFG leaders in Libya released a new "code" for *jihad* in the form of a 417-page religious document titled "Corrective Studies."<sup>24</sup> The new code viewed the armed struggle against Qaddafi's regime as illegal under Islamic law, and set down new guidelines for when and how *jihad* should be fought. However, it also stated that *jihad* would be permissible if Muslim lands were invaded, citing Afghanistan, Iraq and the Palestinian Territories as examples.<sup>25</sup> Many leaders and members of the LIFG were eventually released from prison in March 2010.<sup>26</sup> However, others such as Abd al-Wahab Qa'id were not released until after the uprising against the Qaddafi regime began in March 2011.<sup>27</sup>

The LIFG went on to play a prominent role in challenging the Qaddafi regime during the events of Arab Spring. Following the overthrow of Qaddafi, many leaders and members have created political parties and have opted to participate in the new Libyan political system. Furthermore, LIFG has shifted its efforts toward providing social services and youth activities. In an attempt to change the group's image, the LIFG even changed its name to the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change.

### *Ansar al-Sharia in Libya*

When the LIFG ended its military operations and joined the political process in the post-Qaddafi era, new jihadi groups began to emerge in its absence. Most prominent among these has been *Katibat Ansar al-Sharia* in Benghazi (ASB), which first announced itself in February 2012.<sup>28</sup> The organization is led by Muhammad al-Zawahiri, a former inmate of Qaddafi's infamous Abu Salim prison, who remains the primary suspect in the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.<sup>29</sup> ASB has since changed its name to *Ansar al-Sharia in Libya* (ASL) - a move that signifies its desire to be perceived as a national movement, rather than a rebel fighting force.<sup>30</sup>

ASL should not be confused with *Ansar al-Sharia in Derna* (ASD), despite some crossover in membership and political goals. ASD operates under the leadership of

former Guantanamo Bay inmate Abu Sufyan bin Qumu, and, as the name suggests, is based out of Derna.<sup>31</sup> ASD also shares the similar objective of establishing sharia law in Libya. However, there are no known direct ties between the two *Ansar al-Sharia* organizations.<sup>32</sup>

ASL has been able to expand in size and popularity through its violent *da'wa* campaign at home and abroad.<sup>33</sup> ASL has also involved itself in the training of *jihadis*, preparing them to conflicts in Syria, Mali, and North Africa as foreign fighters.<sup>34</sup> This has further cemented ASL's role as a cog in the facilitation and logistics network within the global *jihadi* movement. However, ASL's most successful method to advance its agenda has been through the provision of social services.<sup>35</sup>

ASL has provided local services similar to those historically provided by other Islamist organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, including infrastructure repair and development projects, the provision of security, and general aid.<sup>36</sup> One of the group's most successful projects has been its anti-drug campaign, which was orchestrated in cooperation with the Rehab Clinic at the Psychiatric Hospital of Benghazi, the Ahli Club (soccer team) the Libya Company (telecom and technology company) and the Technical Company.<sup>37</sup>

In late November 2014, the UN placed both ASB and ASD on its blacklist, adding them to the list of terror organizations associated with al-Qaeda. This designation targets the groups for arms embargos, global travel bans, and asset freezes.<sup>38</sup>

ASL has known ties to several smaller *Salaḥi-jihadi katibas* (battalions) in Libya, including *Katibat Abu 'Ubaydah al-Jarah and Saraya Raf Allah al-Sahati*. Many of these *katibas*, among others, participated in ASL's first "annual conference" held on June 6, 2012.<sup>39</sup> Based on photos from the event, as many as a thousand individuals attended. At that time, it was believed that ASL had only a few hundred members.<sup>40</sup> ASL has made use of the chaos and instability in Libya to strengthen its presence in Libyan communities, including optimizing its social service and community activity as *dawa*.<sup>41</sup>

When retired Libyan Army General Khalifa Haftar initiated his self-declared "Operation Dignity" in May 2014, ASL became one of the key targets of his campaign.<sup>42</sup> Although General Haftar has made progress toward his goal of expelling Islamist forces from Benghazi, the Operation's successes have come at a great cost. In response to "Operation Dignity," ASL launched a violent counteroffensive that killed scores of civilians, as well as soldiers fighting under General Haftar.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the group has made headlines throughout the duration of the Operation. On July 24, 2014, ASL overran Camp 319 and 36th Battalion bases in Benghazi, seizing howitzers, a 2K12 Kub mobile air defense system, Strela-2 MANPADs, ammunition, and military vehicles.<sup>44</sup> Days later, on July 30, ASL declared the city of Benghazi an "Islamic Emirate."<sup>45</sup> Although General Haftar openly declared victory against the Islamist militants in November 2016, ASL remains active in various Benghazi communities.<sup>46</sup>

### *Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL)*

The Islamic State's aspirations for a Libyan province began in 2013, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi deployed an emissary to the eastern city of Derna to examine the possibility of expanding the organization's global reach.<sup>47</sup> Derna has been particularly hospitable to Islamist militants for at least a decade, and ISIS leadership understood that establishing ties to the city could provide a necessary fallback option if the group were to be pushed out of the Levant.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after the Islamic State declared the establishment of its Caliphate in Iraq and Syria, affiliates of the organization began to appear in different countries. By late 2014, Libyan militias and ideologues with ties to Iraq and Syria began pledging their allegiance to the Islamic State, seeking legitimacy through affiliation with the group's brutal brand of Islamism.<sup>49</sup> The establishment of Islamic State provinces in Libya, in turn, provided the terrorist group with a space where it could operate without the burden of government intervention, while taking advantage of the country's strategic proximity to Europe.

Derna was among the group's most important strongholds, as demonstrated by al-Baghdadi's decision to deploy senior leadership from Iraq and Syria to oversee the new affiliate's activities. The Islamic State was simultaneously developing outposts elsewhere in Libya, including Sirte and Sabratha, alongside various neighborhoods seized in Benghazi.

It is difficult to evaluate the size of the Islamic State's forces in Libya, and assessments vary significantly in their estimates. In February 2015, United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) One estimate put the Islamic State in Libya's forces at 1,000 to 3,000 in Libya as of February 2015.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, the Islamic State's Libyan affiliate appears to maintain a much smaller fighting force than its counterpart in Iraq and Syria.<sup>51</sup> In June 2016, the National Bureau of Economic Research estimated that approximately 30,000 fighters have joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The number of native fighters in the group is currently unknown.

In May 2014, French Special Forces assisted General Khalifa Haftar in his self-initiated "Operation Dignity," driving the Islamic State from its posts in Benghazi. At the same time, American airstrikes supported an offensive that eradicated the Islamic State's foothold in Sabratha. These operations greatly diminished the group's presence in Libya, leaving Sirte as the Islamic State's primary stronghold, apart from other small towns nearby.

The Libya affiliate also embraced the gruesome nature of ISIS propaganda. For example, an April 2015 video portrayed the executions of Egyptian Coptic Christians who were abducted by the group, as well as African migrants bound for Europe. (Libya has served as a key stopping-point for migrants, who would eventually cross the Mediterranean via boats and rafts.) The 29-minute video showed a dozen Egyptian men in orange jumpsuits kneeling on a beach, with the Mediterranean in the background. ISIS fighters beheaded the men, and the video showed their blood spilling into the water. The video's second execution scene was filmed in the Libyan desert, with ISIS executioners shooting another 16 prisoners.<sup>52</sup>



The video was heavily scrutinized by experts, with some claiming that it had been altered<sup>53</sup>—raising speculation about the presence of a green screen during the filming process, something that would indicate an advanced propaganda machine, paralleling the propaganda of the Islamic State in Syria.

The Islamic State's extreme ideology and brutal methods, however, were largely unpopular with other *jibadi* organizations in Derna, provoking a violent backlash from these groups. In June 2015, various Derna-based *jihadists* launched an anti-ISIS campaign in coordination with the *Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna*, another *Islamist* militia. This successful operation ultimately forced the Islamic State to withdraw from Derna in a move that was a major setback to the group's aspirations.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these territorial losses, however, the Libyan branch of ISIS remains a potent threat. In June 2016, then-CIA Director John Brennan told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that ISIS' Libya affiliate was the group's most dangerous and developed branch.<sup>55</sup> In his remarks, Brennan warned that the group's influence in Africa posed a significant risk, and that it was capable of staging attacks throughout the region, as well as Europe.

Experts estimate that ISIS has maintained approximately 3,000 fighters in Sirte, although U.S. intelligence reports claimed that, as of late last year, 6,000 fighters occupied the city.<sup>56</sup> In 2016, the group suffered significant territorial losses, with pro-government militias successfully seizing ISIS-held territories within the city of Sirte.<sup>57</sup> These losses were compounded by U.S. aerial operations, which continued through early 2017 and resulted in significant loss of life among ISIS fighters.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, this affiliate remains a major threat to Libya's national security.

## ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Libya has over six and a half million citizens, roughly ninety-seven percent of whom are Sunni Muslim. The remaining three percent includes a mix of Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews.<sup>59</sup> The dominant school of Sunni thought in Libya is the Maliki school, often considered the most moderate of the four traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>60</sup> Non-Sunni Muslims in Libya are primarily native Ibadi Muslims or foreigners from other countries.

For the majority of Libyans, Islam permeates everyday life. In all public schools, alongside the private schools that admit citizens, religious instruction in Islam is compulsory. *Sharia* governs family matters such as inheritance, divorce, and the right to own property.<sup>61</sup>

The dominant role that Islam plays in Libyan society is highlighted by its legal authority as the official state religion, as dictated by the country's interim constitution. *Sharia* law provides the principal source of legislation. However, the constitution of-



fers protections for non-Muslims, who are granted the freedom to practice their own beliefs. Some laws that were enacted during the Qaddafi regime, such as those restricting religious freedom, remain in place, although they are rarely enforced.<sup>62</sup>

The Qaddafi regime was staunchly opposed to Islamism, although the ideology traditionally found few followers inside Libya. However, following Qaddafi's ouster in 2011, Libyans responded enthusiastically to Islamist political parties because they promoted a sense of identity and pledged to maintain order.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, while Libyans continue to grasp for a political identity, many remain skeptical of Islamist extremism.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, almost six years have passed since Qaddafi was removed from power, and the failed political transition has emboldened various Islamist factions and militias.

In the absence of strong political and social institutions, many Islamic organizations have filled the void by providing valuable social and governmental services. By providing services such as health care, youth activity planning, and religious organization, groups like ASL and the LIFG have gradually moved away from their image as global *jihadi* organizations, and gained favorability with domestic populations.

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

When Qaddafi took power in 1969, he implemented a new political system, entitled the *Jamahiriyah*, meaning the "state of the masses." Under this system, he engaged in a series of repressive reforms that outlawed political parties and refused to tolerate any organized political dissent.<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood began to organize in the 1980s with a plan to change the existing regime, albeit via peaceful means. When great socio-economic problems struck Libya in the 1990s, however, the Muslim Brotherhood opted for a more violent path to promote its platform. By 1998, the Qaddafi regime had overcome the Islamic opposition within the country and by the early 2000s, it only small pockets of *jihadist* resistance remained.<sup>66</sup>

After 2005, Qaddafi's son and political advisor, Sayf al Islam, entered negotiations with Islamists to free those imprisoned under the Qaddafi regime in exchange for the recognition of the legitimacy of the government, the renunciation of violence, and formal revisions of their Islamist doctrines. As a result of these negotiations, more than one hundred members of the Muslim Brotherhood were released in 2006, as well as hundreds of members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group by 2008.<sup>67</sup>

When Arab Spring reached Libya in February 2011, the country plunged into civil war. The war ended later that year when Qaddafi's regime was toppled with the assistance of Western airstrikes and the former dictator was assassinated. After Qaddafi's

death, the country began a turbulent transition to democracy. Parliamentary elections were held in 2012 in which the LMB-affiliated Justice and Construction Party (JCP) and the National Forces Alliance ran in opposition to one another.<sup>68</sup>

At the time, Mohammed Sawan led the JCP, overseeing electoral victories in 17 of 80 seats available to parties within the 200-seat parliament.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, the National Forces Alliance won 39 of the 80 seats. To the JCP's dismay, the party did not achieve the same electoral successes as Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party, the JCP's model and inspiration.

Also following Qaddafi's fall, the LIFG split into two political factions - the *Hisb al-Watan* (HW) and *Hisb al-Umma al-Wasat* (HUW) - both of which took part in the legislative elections in 2012. The HW ran as a broad-based moderate party while the HUW ran as a more conservative Islamic party. The HUW claimed the rest of the LIFG members, and operated under the leadership of Sami al-Sa'adi.<sup>70</sup> To their dismay, the HW did not win any seats in the election, while HUW garnered just one seat. The HUW's lone seat was allocated to Abdul Wahhab al-Qa'id, brother of the late Abu Yahya al-Libi, a senior al-Qaeda figure. Other small Islamist parties also failed to make a political showing. The *Salafi* party *al-Asala* failed to win a single seat while the *Hisb al-Islah wa-l-Tanmiyya*, led by former member of the Muslim Brotherhood Khaled al-Werchefani, similarly garnered very little support.

Libya's legislative elections in June 2014 showed improved support for Islamist parties, with 30 of the 80 parliamentary seats available going to Islamist factions or candidates. However, due to political hostilities between secular forces and Islamist militants, the results of the election proved highly contentious.<sup>71</sup>

In May 2014, retired general Khalifa Haftar began "Operation Dignity," a campaign to drive Islamist militants out of Benghazi and eastern Libya.<sup>72</sup> The Operation has been somewhat controversial within the Libyan community, and several senior military officers have refused to enter the campaign.<sup>73</sup> The House of Representatives (HoR) made Haftar the commander of its armed forces in March 2015.<sup>74</sup> Haftar's force, the Libyan National Army (LNA), is a combination of military units, armed regional factions, and tribal groups, and "is not recognized as a proper army by all military personnel across the east or west of Libya."<sup>75</sup> The LNA maintains varying levels of control in central and eastern Libya.<sup>76</sup>

As of early 2017, Libya has three centers of power, two based in Tripoli, and one based in Tobruk and al-Bayda. The most recent is the United Nations-backed Presidential Council (PC), which has been based in Tripoli since March 30, 2016.<sup>77</sup> The PC oversees the Government of National Accord (GNA), which is meant to be the unity government that brings together the warring HoR and the Government of National Salvation, the alternative government proposed by the General National Congress (GNC). The United Nation's peace plan provided that the HoR would become the legislative branch to the GNA's executive branch, while the GNC would become

a State Council that would advise the HoR. However, the HoR has twice refused to ratify the agreement, and the GNC has backed away from its original promise to comply with the plan.<sup>78</sup> Elections were meant to be held within six months of the initial agreement in March 2016, then postponed repeatedly.<sup>79</sup> The HoR has called for elections in February 2018.<sup>80</sup> Whether the UN-backed unity government will endure remains to be seen.

## ENDNOTES

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- [17] Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 93-94.
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- [19] Tawil, *Brothers in Arms*, 65.
- [20] Kohlmann, "Dossier: Libyan Islamic Fighting Group," 8-11.
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