



AL-QAEDA IN LIBYA: A PROFILE

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**Federal Research Division
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540-4840**
Tel: 202-707-3900
Fax: 202-707-3920
E-Mail: frds@loc.gov
Homepage: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/>

PREFACE

This report attempts to assess al-Qaeda's presence in Libya. Al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL) and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have sought to take advantage of the Libyan Revolution to recruit militants and to reinforce their operational capabilities in an attempt to create a safe haven and possibly to extend their area of operations to Libya. Reports have indicated that AQSL is seeking to create an al-Qaeda clandestine network in Libya that could be activated in the future to destabilize the government and/or to offer logistical support to al-Qaeda's activities in North Africa and the Sahel. AQIM has reportedly formed sleeper cells that are probably connected to an al-Qaeda underground network in Libya, likely as a way, primarily, to secure the supply of arms for its ongoing jihadist operations in Algeria and the Sahel. This report discusses how al-Qaeda and its North African affiliate are using communications media and face-to-face contacts to shift the still-evolving post-revolutionary political and social dynamic in Libya in a direction that is conducive to jihad and hateful of the West.

The information in this report is drawn largely from the Internet and Western and Libyan online publications. Particular attention has been given to AQSL and AQIM sources, especially propaganda videos featuring their leaders and a written essay from 'Atiyah al-Libi, an influential Libyan al-Qaeda leader killed in Pakistan by a U.S. drone strike in August 2011. Although a wide range of sources were utilized, including those in French and Arabic, as well as in English, the information found was quite limited and largely presumptive. Given the scarcity of information, further research is needed to better penetrate the organization of al-Qaeda's clandestine network in Libya, its leaders, areas of concentration, and chain of command. The Web addresses presented in this report were valid as of August 2012.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Al-Qaeda has tried to exploit the “Arab Awakening” in North Africa for its own purposes during the past year. Al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL), based in Pakistan, is likely seeking to build a clandestine network in Libya as it pursues its strategy of reinforcing its presence in North Africa and the Middle East, taking advantage of the “Arab Awakening” that has disrupted existing counterterrorism capabilities. Although AQSL’s previous attempt to co-opt the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was inconclusive, the Libyan Revolution may have created an environment conducive to jihad and empowered the large and active community of Libyan jihadists, which is known to be well connected to international jihad.
- AQSL’s strategic goals remain restoration of the caliphate, instituting sharia, and ending the Western presence in Muslim lands. Al-Qaeda’s primary goal in Libya is to establish an Islamic emirate as part of its overall objective to reestablish the caliphate.
- AQSL in Pakistan issued strategic guidance to followers in Libya and elsewhere to take advantage of the Libyan rebellion. AQSL’s strategic guidance was to:
 - gather weapons,
 - establish training camps,
 - build a network in secret,
 - establish an Islamic state, and
 - institute sharia.
- AQSL in Pakistan dispatched trusted senior operatives as emissaries and leaders who could supervise building a network. Al-Qaeda has established a core network in Libya, but it remains clandestine and refrains from using the al-Qaeda name.
- Ansar al-Sharia, led by Sufian Ben Qhumu, a former Guantanamo detainee, has increasingly embodied al-Qaeda’s presence in Libya, as indicated by its active social-media propaganda, extremist discourse, and hatred of the West, especially the United States.
- Al-Qaeda adherents in Libya used the 2011 Revolution to establish well-armed, well-trained, and combat-experienced militias. Militia groups, led by Wisam Ben Hamid and Hayaka Alla,

have adopted similar behavior, with, however, fewer advertised grudges against the West. The only open-source material that has linked these groups, aside from their jihadist credentials and their defense of sharia, is their attachment to the flag that has come to symbolize al-Qaeda.

- The al-Qaeda clandestine network is currently in an expansion phase, running training camps and media campaigns on social-media platforms, such as *Facebook* and *YouTube*. However, it will likely continue to mask its presence under the umbrella of the Libyan Salafist movement, with which it shares a radical ideology and a general intent to implement sharia in Libya and elsewhere.
- Al-Qaeda affiliates such as AQIM are also benefiting from the situation in Libya. AQIM will likely join hands with the al-Qaeda clandestine network in Libya to secure a supply of arms for its areas of operations in northern Mali and Algeria.
- The July 2012 elections failed to generate a strong and unified national leadership that could address the chronic insecurity posed by the multiplicity of local militias, which al-Qaeda's clandestine network has probably infiltrated.
- Al-Qaeda's clandestine network is highly likely to recruit and train local and foreign jihadists to be sent to Syria.

2. GROUP NAMES

Although Al-Qaeda Senior Leadership (AQSL), based in Pakistan, is most likely building a clandestine network in Libya, al-Qaeda may remain for some time without an official Libyan affiliate, as the terrorist organization continues to prize secrecy and to follow its recent trend of distancing itself from its local affiliates, for obvious security reasons. Ansar al-Sharia (Supporters of Sharia), a militia group led by Sufian Ben Qhumu, a former Guantanamo Bay detainee, could be the new face of al-Qaeda in Libya despite its leader's denial. It is increasingly asserting its presence locally and through the Internet (via social media), and Ben Qhumu does not apologize for his hatred of the West, especially the United States.¹

Ansar al-Sharia is a Salafist-jihadist militia based in Benghazi. While the group's size and composition are difficult to ascertain, it maintains an active and aggressive presence on *Facebook* and operates a highly professional media apparatus called the al-Raya Media Productions Foundation, also based in Benghazi. The group's messaging focuses on promoting

¹ Interview with Sufian Ben Qhumu, *al-Ahwal* [Tripoli], May 5, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=371532919560380&set=a.353682918012047.78426.353433611370311&type=1&theater> (accessed May 23, 2012). The organization has a *Facebook* page: "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya" [Supporters of Sharia in Libya], <http://www.facebook.com/anssaralsharieah> (accessed July 25, 2012).

Ansar al-Sharia as a defender of Islam and sharia, and highlighting its goodwill and civic activities in Benghazi, such as visits to hospitals and trash cleanup efforts. Its pamphlets and posters are published on its *Facebook* page as images, usually accompanied by text.²

The name *Ansar al-Sharia* is also being used by al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in so-called liberated areas of Yemen and by Salafist groups in Tunisia. The *Facebook* sites of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and the group in Tunisia appear similar in design and content and also share contacts, suggesting coordination between the groups.³

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a former Libyan militant group with established links with international jihad, has probably ceased to exist. While some of its former leaders have distanced themselves from al-Qaeda and reiterated their intent to play by the democratic rules of the new Libya, clandestinely, some former members of LIFG may be among those helping to create the al-Qaeda network. In 2007 Ayman al-Zawahiri, at the time second in command of al-Qaeda and currently its highest leader, proclaimed the LIFG's affiliation with al-Qaeda, but that claim was not fully substantiated.⁴

Various militias, also known as *katibas* (battalions/brigades), from throughout Libya are thought to be cooperating with Ansar al-Sharia and probably make up the bulk of al-Qaeda's network in Libya, as indicated by the attendance of the first gathering of groups supporting sharia held June 7–8, 2012, at Liberation Square in Benghazi, hosted by Ansar al-Sharia. According to *Libya al-Youm*, a Tripoli newspaper, at least 15 militias attended the event, including: Free Libya Martyrs (Benghazi, Darnah, Kufra), Abu Salim Martyrs (Darnah, Kufra), Faruq (Misrata, Rafallah), al-Sahati (Benghazi), Revolutionaries of Sirt (Sirt, Benghazi), Martyrs (Benghazi), Gulf of Nofaliya Martyrs, Nofaliya Shahid Saleh al-Nass (Benghazi), Ansar al-Hurriya (Benghazi), 'Umar al-Khattab (Benghazi), Ansar al-Sharia (Benghazi), Agency for Preventive Security (Tripoli), Abu 'Ubayda Bin al-Jarrah (Benghazi), Al-Quwarsha Martyrs (Benghazi), Shahid Mohamed al-Hama (Benghazi, Sirt), Mountain (Al-Bayda, Benghazi), and Al-Nur (Darnah).⁵

² See Ansar al-Sharia *Facebook* page: <http://www.facebook.com/anssarelsharieah> (accessed July 26, 2012).

³ "Ansar al-Sharia Discloses Its Leader's Name," *YemenPost* [San'a], April 29, 2012, <http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=5256> (accessed August 17, 2012).

⁴ Sherif Elhelwa, "Waiting for al-Qaeda in Libya," *IPT News*, April 16, 2012, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3537/waiting-for-al-qaeda-in-libya> (accessed April 20, 2012).

⁵ "Multaqha Ansar A-Shari'a Al-Awal Fi Benghazi" [First Gathering of Supporters of Sharia in Benghazi], *Libya al-Yom* [Tripoli], June 9, 2012, <http://www.libya-alyoum.com/news/index.php?id=21&textid=10124> (accessed August 17, 2012); "Al-Multaqha Al-Awal Linusrati a-Shari'a al-Islamiyah Fi Benghazi" [First Gathering To Support the

3. GROUP TYPE

The al-Qaeda clandestine network is certainly a jihadist group, committed to the ideology of al-Qaeda and its objectives of establishing an Islamic state in Libya and eradicating Western influence in the Muslim world in general and in Libya in particular.⁶

4. OBJECTIVES

As stated by ‘Atiyah al-Libi, a Libyan al-Qaeda leader killed in August 2011, in a written document entitled “The Arab Revolutions and the Season of Harvest,” AQSL’s strategic goal in Libya is to foster “a real, radical, and revolutionary change that would affirm the supremacy of Allah’s words and the dominance of sharia.”⁷

This message refers to al-Qaeda’s goal of establishing an Islamic state as an emirate that would be part of the envisioned Islamic caliphate. In the process, al-Qaeda will seek to undermine the current process of rebuilding Libyan state institutions as a way of preventing the establishment of strong state counterterrorism capabilities that could hinder its ability to grow in Libya. As an example of this strategy, in late May 2012, a video surfaced on *YouTube* from the previously unknown figure Abu Mus’ab al-Huwari and narrated by the similarly unknown Abu Dujanah al-Aquri, who identify themselves as “mujahidin.” The video threatens to attack the Libyan government if it refuses to withdraw from counterterrorism agreements with the West, or if it allows its territory to be used to attack jihadists in North Africa, which appears to be a reference to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The video appeared after several attacks on international targets in eastern Libya were committed by jihadist groups, including the Brigades of the Imprisoned Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman in Benghazi.⁸

Islamic Sharia in Benghazi], *YouTube*, June 7, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfdcNzYaqwc&feature=youtu.be> (accessed August 17, 2012).

⁶ ‘Atiyah al-Libi, “A-thawarat al-Arabiyyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad” [The Arab Revolutions and the Season of Harvest], *al-Malamih wal Fiten* [jihadist blog], September 12, 2011, <http://alfetn.com/vb3/showthread.php?t=56267> (accessed March 30, 2012).

⁷ ‘Atiyah al-Libi, “A-thawarat al-Arabiyyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad” [The Arab Revolutions and the Season of Harvest].

⁸ “Risalat Tanthim al-Qha’idah Fi Libya Likuli Libiyin” [Letter of al-Qaeda in Libya to All Libyans], *YouTube*, July 2, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xKFEKrjmDk> (accessed August 17, 2012); “Bomb Targets U.S. Mission in Libya’s Benghazi,” Reuters, June 6, 2012, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/06/06/uk-libya-attack-us-idUKBRE8550GV20120606> (accessed August 17, 2012).

The goal of an Islamic state in Libya is likely shared by segments of the militia community, which for the most part have resisted laying down arms as requested by the transitional government. These segments also tend to be suspicious of the West and its secular allies. Comments on *Facebook* regarding a report on al-Qaeda in Darnah by *Libya al-Mustaqhbal*, a Libyan newspaper, show significant numbers of commentators playing down the risk of a radical Islamist-led insurgency and pointing to a possible Western conspiracy to intervene in Libya.⁹

In addition, Libyans are generally supportive of a strong Islamic national identity and typically see nothing wrong with Islam playing a central role in politics and state affairs. Even “liberals” tend to espouse the general Islamic framework that places sharia principles at the center of public affairs so as not to alienate the local electorate. In such an environment, radical Islamist discourse can prosper, allowing al-Qaeda’s narrative to occupy a substantial space that AQSL is likely to exploit in order to pursue one of al-Qaeda’s earliest strategic objectives—creating a Libyan affiliate. According to Noman Bentoman, a former LIFG member who is currently an analyst at the Quilliam Foundation, a British think-tank, the creation of an al-Qaeda affiliate in Libya was and most likely has remained a strategic objective for Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹⁰

This objective may explain the prolific and forthcoming guidance directed at Libyans by senior al-Qaeda leaders of Libyan descent, especially from Abu Yahya al-Libi, al-Qaeda’s chief ideologue, killed in June 2012 by a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan. AQSL has developed a specific narrative that sets al-Qaeda’s own expectations and standards as a measure of success for the Libyan Revolution by emphasizing the commonality between al-Qaeda’s goals of reestablishing the supremacy of sharia through universal jihad and the quest for dignity at the forefront of the Libyan Revolution. Abu Yahya particularly warned Libyan rebels—referred to as *mujahidin*, i.e.,

⁹ Facebook Comments, http://ar-ar.facebook.com/dernamediacentre/map?activecategory=%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1&session_id=1334542741&filter=1 (accessed July 1, 2012).

¹⁰ Noman Benotman and James Brandon, “The Jihadist Threat in Libya,” Quilliam Foundation [London], March 24, 2011, <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/images/stories/pdfs/libya24march11.pdf> (accessed April 3, 2012); Nader al-‘Umrani, “Sir Taqhadum a-Tayar a-Liberali Wa Tafawiqhihi Fi Nitham al-Qhaimah” [Secret of The Advance of the Liberal Movement and its Success in the System of Lists [electoral]], *al-Manarah* [Tripoli], July 15, 2012, <http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/07/20076/%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-%d8%b3%d8%b1-%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%af%d9%85-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a8%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%84/> (accessed July 17, 2012).

jihadists—against complacency that would allow the United States and its local protégés to hijack their victory in the name of democracy.¹¹

5. ETHNIC, POLITICAL, AND RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

The al-Qaeda clandestine network in Libya is most likely espousing a Taliban-like religious orientation that calls for strict adherence to the practice and principles of Islam as interpreted by radical clerics. Its militants and sympathizers are likely to have long beards, wear Afghan clothes, and show little tolerance for the slightest deviation from what they believe is the right path of Islam, as indicated by a woman in Darnah who complained about the accusatory and judgmental look (probably because of the way she was dressed) of Ansar al-Sharia's militants, believed to be linked to al-Qaeda.¹²

By emphasis on strict adherence to religious scriptures, AQSL is likely seeking to foster a religious divide between Salafist extremists and moderate Islamists as a way of feeding radicalism and shifting popular belief to a more extreme version of Islam, such the one al-Qaeda typically espouses. The latter could then enjoy more latitude in recruiting militants and building popular support. For instance, Abu Yahya called on Libyan clerics to get involved in politics to ensure the Islamic character of the state and to veto those among the politicians whose attachment to Islam is not sincere—a reference to “hypocrites,” or *al-Munafiqhin* in Arabic, a term used by extremists for moderate Islamists or secular Muslims who lean toward compromise. Abu Yahya, in line with traditional al-Qaeda beliefs, suggests that the fine Islamic words and outer behavior of these “hypocrites” may not reflect their true intent, which is to accommodate secularism.¹³

Al-Qaeda's clandestine network is also likely promoting an extreme position regarding the treatment of former Libyan officials and public servants whom al-Qaeda typically considers “apostates.” For instance, Ansar al-Sharia, a *katiba* (battalion in Arabic) headed by Sufian Ben Qhumu, a former al-Qaeda operative believed to have links with the al-Qaeda's clandestine

¹¹ Abu Yahya al-Libi, “Libya Matha Yuradu Biha” [Libya: What Is Assigned To It], *YouTube*, December 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm1a8Hhpjn4> (accessed April 24, 2012).

¹² Asmaa Elourfi, “Al-Qaeda Elements Surface in Derna,” *Magharebia*, April 5, 2012, http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2012/04/05/feature-01 (accessed April 20, 2012).

¹³ Aaron Zelin and Andrew Lebovich, “Assessing Al-Qa’ida’s Presence in the New Libya,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 22, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/assessing-al-qaidas-presence-in-the-new-libya> (accessed March 28, 2012).

network in Darnah, is thought to be responsible for several bombings that targeted former public servants.¹⁴

Such targeted killings may constitute another recruitment tool for al-Qaeda among disenchanting former rebels who still crave revenge while undermining the government's national reconciliation efforts. Islamists who suffered the most under Qadhafi's regime have resented and opposed the Transitional National Council's (TNC)'s mild and conciliatory attitude toward *azlam Nitham* (remnants of the ousted regime), as expressed by 'Abd al-Hakim al-Hasidi, a former jihadist and rebel leader in Darnah.¹⁵

The al-Qaeda clandestine network may also be utilizing tribal and ethnic divides to build alliances and support, especially in the south, where Arab tribes are fighting the Tubu (Tebu) African minority that straddles the Libya–Chad border. Dir' Libya, a *katiba* commanded by Wisam Ben Hamid and his lieutenant Hayaka Alla that fights under al-Qaeda's flag, is involved in the fight, siding with the Arab tribes in Kufra and Sabha against the Tubu.¹⁶

6. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Al-Qaeda's presence in Libya was reported in the early stages of the Revolution, probably because of the rebels' violent actions and Islamist jihadist discourse, which the Qadhafi regime attempted to attribute to al-Qaeda. The first day of the rebellion, angry mobs attacked police stations and government buildings, and three days later, on February 20, 2012, a suicide bomber destroyed Qadhafi's security forces' headquarters in Benghazi. Qadhafi's government early on accused al-Qaeda of instigating the rebellion, pointing to former LIFG leaders as orchestrating an Islamist insurgency to create an Islamic emirate in eastern Libya, especially in Darnah, a town famous for its export of jihadists.¹⁷

¹⁴ Asmaa Elourfi, "Al-Qaeda Elements Surface in Derna", *Magharebia*, April 5, 2012.

¹⁵ Sahivat al-Ahwal, interview with 'Abd al-Hakim al-Hasidi, *al-Ahwal* [Tripoli], May 3, 2012, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9/353433611370311> (accessed July 25, 2012).

¹⁶ "Ajil: 'Ishrin Qhatilan we Jarihan Fi Ahdathi Ashtibakatin 'Anifa Bi al-Kufra Januba Libya" [Urgent: Twenty Killed and Injured in the Recent Violent Clashes in Kufra, Southern Libya], *ThawraLibya* [Tripoli], April 21, 2012, http://www.thawralibya.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4401:2012-04-21-14-58-11&catid=37:topnews&Itemid=397 (accessed April 25, 2012).

¹⁷ John Rosenthal, "The Islamist Plot: The Untold Story of The Libyan Revolution," *National Review Online*, February 17, 2012, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/291316/islamist-plot-untold-story-libyan-rebellion-john-rosenthal?pg=1> (accessed April 13, 2012).

Qadhafi's opponents, including secular Muslims, dismissed the Libyan government's allegations as propaganda. They defended the rebels' violent tactics as a legitimate means of countering the deadly crackdown by the state security apparatus and lobbied the West for military intervention. For many, it was clear that the Libyan uprising had an undeniable spontaneous and popular basis that could not be reduced solely to an al-Qaeda-led insurgency as Qadhafi alleged. It is, however, possible that al-Qaeda's operatives and sympathizers could have easily blended into the rebel movement without notice and gained influence in the violent and chaotic Libyan revolutionary environment, given their combat skills and ideological motivation.¹⁸

The TNC, which lobbied for Western military intervention and has remained officially allied with the West, never fully controlled the rebel movement. Its military wing, first headed by 'Abdel Fattah Yunus, Qadhafi's former army chief of staff, lacked a functional chain of command for the disparate and fragmented rebellion. Yunus would eventually be assassinated in July 2011, most likely by one of the Islamist rebel factions close to al-Qaeda. Indeed, a fatwa circulated during the same period on the jihadist Web sites recommending the assassination of former Qadhafi aides who did not repent for their misdeeds.¹⁹

The assassination of Yunus, which was not fully investigated, has empowered the Islamists of the former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) inside the TNC. 'Abdel Hakim Belhaj, former LIFG emir, was appointed by the TNC's president as the military commander of Tripoli, controlling the 20,000-strong Tripoli Military Council (TMC). Later, with his political ally, 'Ali Sallabi, a prominent cleric with links to the international branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, he forced the resignation of Mahmoud Jibril, the former TNC chief executive, whom they probably perceived as too secular. These two Islamist leaders are expected to play a major role in the new Libya, partly because of the support they are believed to enjoy from Qatar.²⁰

¹⁸ Rosenthal, "The Islamist Plot: The Untold Story of The Libyan Revolution."

¹⁹ "Murasalat Siriyah Bayna Thuwaru Libya wa Munathir al-Qha'ida" [Secret Correspondences between Libyan Rebels and an Al-Qaeda Ideologue], *Ennahar* [Algiers], July 23, 2011, <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/specialpages/international/84825-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%91%D8%B1%E2%80%AE-%E2%80%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9%E2%80%AE%E2%80%AC.html> (accessed April 4, 2012).

²⁰ Emma Farge, "Interview-Libya Islamists Call for PM Jibril's Exit," Reuters, September 20, 2011, <http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFL5E7KK3SB20110920> (accessed April 25, 2012).

The LIFG was a jihadist organization created in the late 1980s by Libyan opponents of the Qadhafi regime who shared al-Qaeda's pan-Islamic vision and strategy of violence against Muslim rulers and foreign occupiers of Muslim lands. However, its leaders may not have pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden, despite al-Zawahiri's proclamation in 2007 of the LIFG's affiliation with al-Qaeda. Belhaj, who was detained in a Libyan prison at that time, denied any involvement in the September 2001 attack against the United States and other terrorist acts targeting the West.²¹

The LIFG was, nonetheless, fully engaged in jihad in various parts of the Muslim world and, as a consequence, classified as a terrorist organization whose leaders were arrested and prosecuted around the world. 'Abd Rahman al-Faqih, a member of the LIFG Shura Council, was linked by a British court to the 2003 terrorist attack in Casablanca, Morocco, and to Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqhawi, the founder of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Sami al-Sa'adi, alias Abu al-Munthir, the LIFG's ideologue, was allegedly involved in a propaganda campaign to encourage young British Muslims to conduct terrorist attacks in their home country as a punishment for British involvement in Afghanistan.²²

By the early 2000s, most LIFG leaders had been imprisoned in Libya—thanks to the effective collaboration between Libyan and Western counterterrorism services—and their organizations had been decapitated. While incarcerated, they conducted a comprehensive review of their movement's jihadist ideology. 'Ali Sallabi moderated the review and ensured its validation by prominent Islamic scholars from Libya and other Muslim countries. The review, referred to by the Arabic word *al-Muraja'at*, concluded that the use of violence as a means of overthrowing governments in Muslim countries was illegal from an Islamic point of view. This fatwa was widely considered a serious ideological blow for al-Qaeda-type jihadists. Al-Qaeda never responded to the LIFG's review, as it did earlier to a similar effort by former Egyptian jihadists, probably for security reasons—their constant surveillance by drones may have made it too dangerous to risk responding to such a highly scholarly document—or simply because Abu

²¹ 'Abdel Hakim Belhaj, "The Revolution Belongs to All Libyans, Seculars or Not," *Guardian* [London], September 27, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/sep/27/revolution-belongs-to-all-libyans> (accessed April 17, 2012).

²² Rosenthal, "The Islamist Plot: The Untold Story of The Libyan Revolution."

Yahya may not have been interested in engaging in a religious argument with his elder brother, Abd al-Wahab al-Qaid, a member of the LIFG's leadership who wrote the review.²³

As a result of *al-Muraja'at*, the LIFG ceased officially to exist, and its leaders were freed in 2010, along with hundreds of Islamist militants, as part of a "reconciliation and dialogue" process spearheaded by Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam. This process, reportedly opposed by high officials in the Libyan security services, was probably blessed by the U.S. government, as indicated by the presence of the American ambassador at the March 2010 speech by Saif al-Islam marking the release of Belhaj and 213 other Islamist detainees.²⁴

Although it is not clear whether the LIFG reconstituted its ranks and chain of command during the Libyan uprising, it is likely that former LIFG leaders have utilized their former network and previous al-Qaeda-type rhetoric and tactics of engagement to rally support among the rebels and to score military victories. 'Abd al-Hakim al-Hasidi and Sufian Ben Qhumu, former LIFG operatives, were cited in the early phases of the uprising as having positions of command in Darnah, a town in eastern Libya famous for its remarkably high proportion of jihadists.²⁵

Former LIFG leaders most likely have known about al-Qaeda's presence in Libya, given their history of acquaintance as well as their probably keen knowledge of the Libyan community of jihadists. However, they will likely distance themselves from AQSL in an effort to maintain working relations with the West, which they certainly consider essential to preserving and consolidating their positions in government. In a column he wrote for the *Guardian* of London, Belhaj defended his past jihadist background as dictated by the unique circumstances of Libya under the dictatorship of Qadhafi, and he projected an image of moderation and pragmatism in his vision for the new Libya, without, however, giving up on his Islamist agenda.²⁶

²³ Camille Tawil, "The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb: Expansion in the Sahel and Challenges from Within Jihadist Circles," The Jamestown Foundation, April 2010, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?Q=cache:tRp5l0n8t5IJ:www.securitymanagementinitiative.org/index.php?option%3Dcom_docman%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D465%26Itemid%3D28%26lang%3Den&finally,+it+is+clear+that+the+corrective+studies+issued+by+the+LIFG+appear+to+be+gaining+momentum&hl=fr&gl=us (accessed April 25, 2012).

²⁴ John Rosenthal, "Al-Qaeda Takes Tripoli," Gatestone Institute, September 9, 2011, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/2409/al-qaeda-takes-tripoli> (accessed April 25, 2012).

²⁵ Rod Nordland and Scott Shane, "Libyan, Once a Detainee, Is Now US Ally of Sorts," *New York Times*, April 24, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/25/world/guantanamo-files-libyan-detainee-now-us-ally-of-sorts.html> (accessed April 25, 2012).

²⁶ 'Abdel Hakim Belhaj, "The Revolution Belongs to All Libyans, Secular or Not."

7. ORGANIZATION

No information is available in open sources regarding the al-Qaeda clandestine network's organization in Libya, probably because of the secrecy that surrounds al-Qaeda's presence in the country. However, a December 2011 CNN report states that al-Qaeda's leadership has sent experienced jihadists to Libya in an effort to build a fighting force, including veteran operative "AA" who had been detained in Britain on suspicion of terrorism. A source describes him as committed to al-Qaeda's global cause and to attacking U.S. interests. A CNN source stated that al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri personally dispatched "AA" to Libya in mid-2011 and that "AA" has since begun recruiting fighters in the eastern region of the country, near the Egyptian border. He now has mobilized more than 200 fighters. "AA" has been close to al-Zawahiri since the 1980s and first traveled to Afghanistan in the early 1990s to join mujahidin fighting the Soviet occupation, as did hundreds of Arab fighters. "AA" later moved to the United Kingdom, where he began spreading al-Qaeda's ideology to younger Muslims.²⁷



Source: U.S. Military

"AA" likely is Abd al-Baset Azzouz, who had been living in the UK and was arrested on May 24, 2006. Upon release, "AA" left Britain late in 2009 and went back to the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. His selection for the Libyan mission indicates that senior al-Qaeda leaders trust him to carry out the strategic task of establishing an al-Qaeda network in Libya. It is likely that

²⁷ Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "Al Qaeda Sent Fighters to Libya," CNN, December 30, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-12-29/middleeast/world_meast_libya-jihadists_1_al-qaeda-leader-ayman-al-zawahiri-Qadhafi-regime?_s=PM:MIDDLEEAST (accessed August 17, 2012).

Azzouz will operate in conjunction with other senior al-Qaeda operatives in Libya. Whether or not this is true, according to the same report, Azzouz had already recruited 200 militants in Libya's eastern region, suggesting that he is one of the major leaders of al-Qaeda in Libya.²⁸

Presently, Al-Qaeda seems to have opted for a decentralized approach that concentrates on infiltrating local Islamist-dominated militias (see fig. 1, below). For instance, a March 2012 report from *Dunya al-Watan*, a Palestinian newspaper, published a video-illustrated article describing a military parade reportedly organized by Katiba al-A'hrar Libya (Free Libya), commanded by Wisam Ben Hamid, in the city of Sirt, a former Qadhafi stronghold, that looked like an al-Qaeda-type demonstration. The article pointed at Wisam, a 35-year-old Libyan from the town of Darnah, as the leader of al-Qaeda in Libya. The same article reported that Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar, the leader of AQIM in the Sahara, attended the parade as the honored guest of Wisam.²⁹

However, Wisam was also cited by *Thawrat Libya*, a Libyan news outlet, as the leader of Dir' Libya (Shield of Libya), a *katiba* involved in the fight against the African Tubu minority in Kufra, a town in southwestern Libya, on behalf of the Libyan army. Dir' Libya may be another name for Katiba al-A'hrar Libya that was given in the context of fighting the Tubu minority, which the militiamen accused of separatist ambitions.³⁰

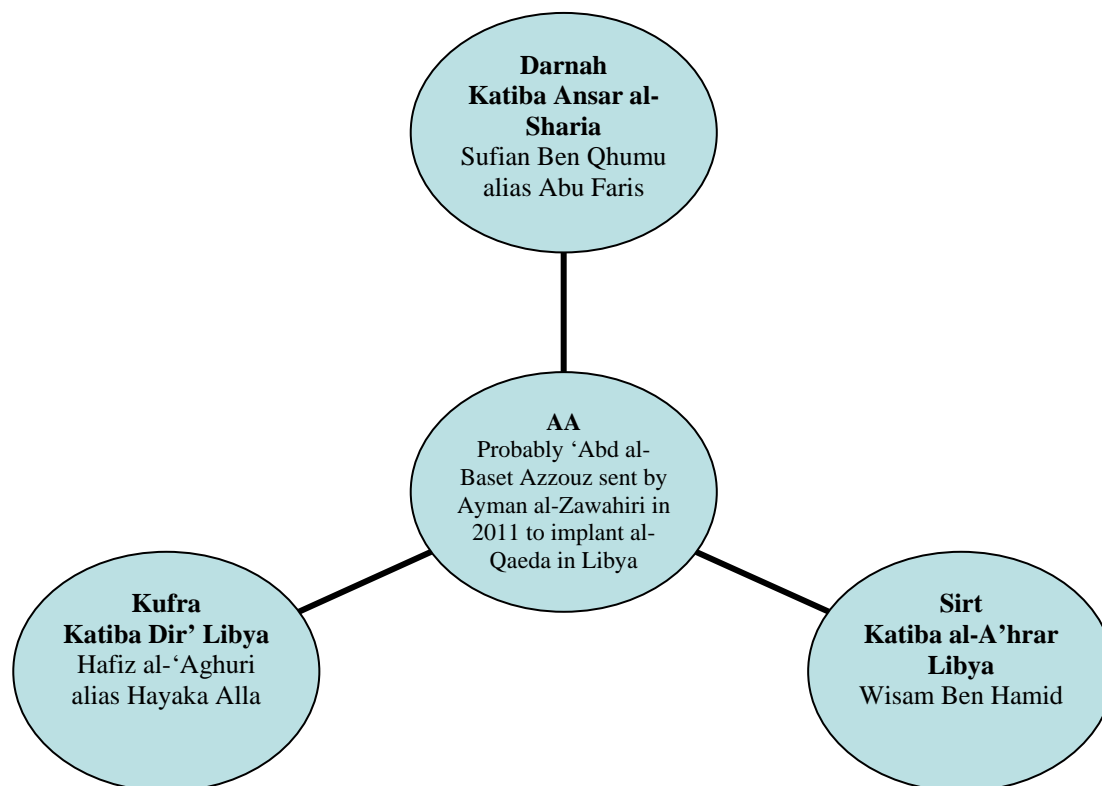
Another *katiba* believed to be close to the al-Qaeda clandestine network is Ansar al-Sharia in Darnah, eastern Libya. The battalion is led by Sufian Ben Qhumu, a former al-Qaeda operative, whom Darnah's residents have accused of carrying out attacks, especially targeting former Libyan officials but also people who disagree with al-Qaeda, and even former LIFG's leaders, such as 'Abd al-Hakim al-Hasidi.³¹

²⁸ Asim Qureshi, "Interview with Abdul Baset Azzouz," *Cageprisoners* [London], April 23, 2008, <http://www.cageprisoners.com/our-work/interviews/item/146-interview-with-abdul-baset-azzouz> (accessed August 17, 2012); "Letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair," *Libya-Watanona* [Manchester], June 12, 2006, <http://www.libya-watanona.com/news/lcoma/lc13066y.htm> (accessed August 17, 2012); Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "Al Qaeda Sent Fighters to Libya"; U.S. military.

²⁹ "Ard 'Askari Litanthim al-Qha'ida Fi Madinati "Sirt" al-Libiyah – Fidjo" [Al-Qaeda's Military Parade in the Libyan Town of Sirt – video], *Dunya al-Watan* [Gaza], March 26, 2012, <http://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2012/03/26/263533.html> (accessed April 3, 2012).

³⁰ "Ajil: 'Ishrin Qhatilan we Jarihan Fi Ahdathi Ashtibakatin 'Anifa Bi al-Kufra Januba Libya" [Urgent: Twenty Killed and Injured in the Recent Violent Clashes in Kufra, Southern Libya].

³¹ Asmaa Elourfi, "Al-Qaeda Elements Surface in Derna."



Source: Based on information from a variety of sources used in the preparation of this report.

Figure 1. Major Channels by Which al-Qaeda Is Attempting to Infiltrate Libyan Militias

8. PRINCIPAL LEADERS

Abu Yahya al-Libi was al-Qaeda's second in command and chief ideologue. His Libyan origin put him in a position to greatly influence al-Qaeda's strategy and behavior in Libya. He spoke multiple times to Libyan jihadists before his death in June 2012 during a U.S. drone attack in Pakistan.³²

³² Paul Cruickshank, "Al-Libi Death a Major Blow to Al-Qaeda," CNN, June 5, 2012, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/06/05/al-libi-loss-would-be-major-blow-for-al-qaeda/> (accessed July 6, 2012).



Abu Yahya al-Libi

Source: <http://keepTonyblairforpm.wordpress.com/2009/01/22/al-qaeda-call-to-attack-criminal-britain/>

‘Abd al-Hamid al-Ruqhay’, or Anas a-Suba’, or Nazih ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Rughi, alias Abu Anas al-Libi, was born in 1964 and raised in Tripoli before moving in the late 1980s to Afghanistan and Sudan, where he is believed to have met Osama Bin Laden and joined al-Qaeda. He was granted asylum in Britain in the late 1990s but fled that country in 1999 to avoid arrest when he was convicted by an American court in relation to the 1998 terrorist attacks against U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam. He is a computer engineer and an al-Qaeda-trained intelligence specialist. Although he was reportedly tasked by al-Zawahiri with the mission of creating an al-Qaeda clandestine network in Libya, his current whereabouts are unknown.³³

Abu Anas’s mission in Libya remains clandestine, and he is most likely involved in al-Qaeda strategic planning and coordination between AQSL and Libyan Islamist militias who adhere to al-Qaeda's ideology. Abu Anas is well trained in operational security and he is likely co-located with other senior al-Qaeda members in Libya, possibly with Abd al-Baset Azzouz. Operators of al-Qaeda in Libya have been conducting consultations with AQSL in Afghanistan and Pakistan about announcing the presence of a branch of the organization that will be led by returnees from Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and by leading figures from the former LIFG.

³³ “Anas al-Libi” [Anas al-Libi], *al-Sakina* [Tripoli], February 18, 2012, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/13102.html> (accessed April 30, 2012).

Reporting indicates that intense communications from AQSL are conducted through Abu Anas al-Libi, who is believed to be an intermediary between al-Zawahiri and jihadists in Libya.³⁴



Abu Anas al-Libi

Source: *al-Sakinah*, <http://www.assakina.com/center/parties/13102.html>
and U.S. Military

Wisam Ben Hamid is a young rebel leader who allegedly fought in Iraq. He has been cited as the leader of Katiba al-A'hrar Libya and also Katiba Dir' Libya, both involved in postrevolutionary militia fighting in the Qadhafi stronghold Sirt and in Kufra in southeast Libya. He has been cited as one of the possible leaders of al-Qaeda in Libya even though it is unlikely, given his prominence in the media, which contradicts AQSL's usual penchant for secrecy.

³⁴ "Tanthim al-Qha'idah Yuhadiru Li'ilani Wujudihi Ghariban Fi Libya" [Al-Qaeda is Getting Ready to Announce Soon its Presence in Libya], *Al-Khabar* [Algiers], September 12, 2011, <http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/monde/264781.html> (accessed August 17, 2012).



Wisam Ben Hamid

Source: <http://ar-ar.facebook.com/pages/%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D8%B3/111384285626097>

Hafiz al-‘Aghuri, alias Hayaka Alla, is a close ally of Wisam Ben Hamid, with whom he fought as the leader of Sariya (small fighting unit) la-Hawn and with whom he shares the leadership of Dir’ Libya. Both of them are reportedly involved in the fight against the Tubu minority in Kufra. In a *YouTube* video (see accompanying picture), he addressed a message to a Libyan government member who played down the importance of his *katiba*, Dir’ Libya. He claimed that Dir’ Libya has secured the southeast border with Chad and Egypt without asking anything from the government.³⁵

³⁵ “Risala Shadidatu al-Lahja Ila Wasir a-Diva’a” [A Strongly-worded Letter to the Minister of Defense], *YouTube*, April 13, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrcFCZ-mYd4&feature=player_embedded (accessed May 22, 2012).



Hafiz al-'Aghuri, alias Hayaka Alla, the spokesman of Dir' Libya

Source: <http://www.facebook.com/NationalTransitionalCouncil.Libya/posts/471645696198425>

Sufian Ben Qhumu, alias Abu Faris, was formerly a driver for Osama Bin Laden and later a Guantanamo Bay detainee. He was transferred to a Libyan prison in 2007 and released in 2010 as part of a deal Saif al-Islam Qadhafi brokered with LIFG's former leaders. Below is a 2007 photo of him that *al-Ahwal*, an online newspaper, published along with an interview it conducted with him on May 5, 2012. In this interview, Ben Qhumu, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia, denied any links with al-Qaeda but discoursed at length about his resentment of the United States, which he accused of torturing him during his Guantanamo detention, an experience that he said will not go away.³⁶



Sufian Ben Qhumu, leader of Ansar al-Sharia

Source: <http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=371532919560380&set=a.353682918012047.78426.353433611370311&type=1&theater>

³⁶ Interview with Sufian Ben Qhumu, *al-Ahwal*.

9. HEADQUARTERS

Although no information in open sources was found regarding the whereabouts of al-Qaeda's leadership in Libya, it is likely that at this point al-Qaeda's clandestine network is run directly by AQSL in Pakistan. Abu Anas al-Libi, thought to be the interface between AQSL and al-Qaeda's militants in Libya, has not spoken yet, nor have any of his surrogates, as is typically the case when an al-Qaeda local or regional affiliate is forming.

10. COMMAND AND CONTROL

As previously mentioned, no structured command is reported to have been put in place by al-Qaeda in Libya at this time. Orders and field reports are likely transmitted from and to AQSL in Pakistan through selected couriers, the typically preferred method of communication with al-Qaeda headquarters in Pakistan, for obvious security reasons.

11. MEMBERSHIP SIZE

The number of al-Qaeda militants in Libya remains unknown because of the secrecy surrounding its implantation. If the already-mentioned December 2011 CNN report is accurate, a few hundred al-Qaeda members must currently be operating in Libya. Most of them are likely connected with the three *katibas*—Ansar al-Sharia in Darnah, al-A'hrar Libya in Sirt, and Dir' Libya in Kufra—that have so far attracted scrutiny by their radical rhetoric and allegiance to the black flag, which symbolizes the commitment to al-Qaeda-type militant jihad. Dir' Libya claimed to have more than seven hundred fighters in Kufra in southeast Libya in early 2012, according to its spokesman, Hayaka Alla.³⁷

Al-Qaeda is trying to expand its appeal through the use of front organizations, such as Ansar al-Sharia. Al-Qaeda operatives have returned from Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Europe, and elsewhere to help constitute a Libyan branch of al-Qaeda. Although foreign jihadists and al-Qaeda members are likely present, senior Libyan operatives are probably in command of the al-

³⁷ "Risala Shadidatu al-Lahja Ila Wasir a-Diva'a" [A Strongly-worded Letter to the Minister of Defense]; Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "Al Qaeda Sent Fighters to Libya."

Qaeda associated network nodes in Libya. Al-Qaeda will probably refrain from using the al-Qaeda name and instead may use other names, such as Ansar al-Sharia, or simply *mujahedin*.³⁸

12. RECRUITMENT AND INDOCTRINATION

Al-Qaeda's clandestine network is likely recruiting local militiamen in order to infiltrate and manipulate militias, which are expected, at least for a while, to maintain their armed capabilities and political clout. Mahmoud Jibril, the former prime minister and senior member of the Transitional National Council (TNC), raised the alarm about such an infiltration in a March 2012 meeting in Brussels when he blamed Western powers for leaving Libya in the hands of Islamist extremist militias. Jibril resigned under pressure from 'Ali Sallabi, a prominent Muslim cleric close to the Muslim Brotherhood, and from 'Abdel Hakim Belhaj, the powerful leader of the Tripoli Military Council, a 20,000-strong militia that has shared the control of Tripoli with two other militias.³⁹

Commenting on Jibril's speech, *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, a London-based Middle Eastern newspaper, in its March 28, 2012, editorial, suggested that al-Qaeda already controls large areas in Libya, undoubtedly echoing the established belief that local militias are dominated by Islamist extremists. This sentiment is also doubtlessly reinforced by propaganda videos released on the Internet that resemble those typically broadcast by jihadist groups.⁴⁰

Postrevolutionary Libya is a militarized society where young self-proclaimed jihadists are on the loose, ready to follow anyone offering a meaningful purpose for their newly acquired combat skills. Al-Qaeda's clandestine network is likely attempting to attract these self-proclaimed jihadists through a mix of ideology, intimidation, and financial incentive. For instance, in Darnah, Ansar al-Sharia is believed to be conducting clandestine attacks targeting the former regime's officials and public servants, which al-Qaeda typically considers

³⁸ "Tanthim al-Qha'idah Yuhadiru Li'ilani Wujudihi Ghariban Fi Libya" [Al-Qaeda is Getting Ready to Announce Soon its Presence in Libya].

³⁹ "Libya wa Qhadabu a-Sayd Jibril" [Libya and the Anger of Mr. Jibril], *al-Quds al-'Arabi* [London], March 28, 2012, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=data%5C2012%5C03%5C03-28%5C28qpt999.htm&arc=data%5C2012%5C03%5C03-28%5C28qpt999.htm> (accessed March 30, 2012).

⁴⁰ "Kalimat Amr Katibatu Shuhada Libya al-Hura Wisam Ben Hamid" [Speech of the Emir of Shuhada Libya Katiba Wisam Ben Hamid], *YouTube*, February 11, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJ8PplHcZQc> (accessed May 4, 2012) ; "Libya wa Qhadabu a-Sayd Jibril" [Libya and the Anger of Mr. Jibril].

“apostates,” probably as a way to attract youth who retain their resentment of the former regime. Also, Ansar al-Sharia has reportedly used payment to attract recruits.⁴¹

In addition, AQSL’s propaganda is typically filled with praise for mujahidin who take up arms for the sake of God, and its message has been broadcast to all Libyan rebels without distinction so as to nurture a self-fulfilling prophecy. Abu Yahya al-Libi has consistently spoken of Libyan rebels as mujahidin and has constantly attempted to provide them with a higher sense of purpose than they may have had when they took up arms in the first place. Such a communication strategy may have been effective in instilling a sense of self-empowerment among former rebels that may help to explain the hard stance taken by local militias in their interaction with the transitional government.⁴²

Finally, al-Qaeda adherents in Libya appear to follow the fatwa of al-Qaeda’s legal forum in their goal to organize and take action. For instance, on May 24, 2011, replying to a letter sent to him by a Libyan rebel calling himself “Abou Jandal Al-Libi,” Abou-Mouslim al-Djazairi, al-Qaeda theorist and member of the so-called lawful committee of *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* (Podium of Unification and Jihad), urged the rebels in Libya to form an armed organization and to split from, and wash their hands of, the leaders of the Libyan opposition at the head of the Transitional National Council. He stated that the TNC has “embroiled itself as well as all Libya in the swamp of servitude to the Crusaders.” He advised them to “form an organization bringing together sincere and loyal people,” stressing in this respect the need to do this secretly because “the battle for Libya has not yet begun.” Also, he urged the Libyan rebels to coordinate action with active terrorist organizations in other regions. Al-Qaeda adherents such as Abu Jandal al-Libi are likely to take action against the TNC or its successor if threatened.⁴³

13. MEMBERSHIP

Although al-Qaeda’s clandestine network is primarily targeting Libyans, who can easily melt into the population and are unlikely to raise suspicion or acquire the labeling associated with foreign fighters, the network may already comprise non-Libyans from neighboring

⁴¹ Asmaa Elourfi, “Al-Qaeda Elements Surface in Derna.”

⁴² Abu Yahya al-Libi, “Libya Matha Yuradu Biha” [Libya: What Is Assigned to It], *YouTube*, December 6, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm1a8Hhpj4> (accessed April 24, 2012).

⁴³ “Kayfa Tarawna al-Majlis al-Intiqhali Fi Libya” [How Do You See the Transitional Council in Libya], *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* [jihadist Web site], n. d., http://www.tawhed.ws/FAQ/display_question?qid=4717&text=%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7 (accessed August 20, 2012).

countries and Europeans of North African descent. *Elkhabar*, an Algerian newspaper, reported that Algerian security services in the Ilizi region arrested a young Algerian who had a video showing al-Qaeda combat in the town of Misrata. The man is suspected of membership in al-Qaeda in Libya and is believed to have received training in one of its camps, according to the newspaper. *Elkhabar* suggested that hundreds of so-called Libyan jihadists are believed to operate in Syria and that a number of Moroccans and Algerians have crossed the Libyan border from Tunisia for training. The newspaper identified one of them as an al-Qaeda recruit in Libya: “A. Wajan, alias Abu al-Qhasem al-Muhajir, a French citizen of Algerian descent.”⁴⁴

Libya has a substantial community of hard-core jihadists, as shown in the figure below, as well as a postrevolutionary environment conducive to jihad, which the al-Qaeda clandestine network is probably focused on as a way of creating a solid base from which to launch jihad elsewhere, Syria in particular (see fig. 2, below). Libya may already have become the favorite destination for would-be jihadists in Syria. Reports have indicated that Algerians, Tunisians, Egyptians, and Europeans from North Africa are increasingly crossing Libya’s borders on their way to Syria, probably with the blessing of the current Libyan government. As an indication of such support, ‘Abdel Hakim Belhaj, former LIFG emir and current military governor of Tripoli, reportedly met with the leaders of the military wing of the Syrian opposition at the border between Syria and Turkey to discuss possible military assistance.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Muhammad Ben Ahmad, “Al-amn al-Faransi Yashtabihu Fi Tanaqhuli Faransiyin Min Usul Magharibiyah Lil Qhital Fi Suria” [French Security Services Suspect French Citizens of North African Descent of Fighting in Syria], *Elkhabar* [Algiers], March 13, 2012, <http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/politique/283238.html> (accessed April 11, 2012).

⁴⁵ Ruth Sherlock, “Leading Libyan Islamists Met Syrian Army Opposition Group,” *Telegraph* [London], November 27, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8919057/Leading-Libyan-Islamist-met-Free-Syrian-Army-opposition-group.html> (accessed April 17, 2012).

Figure 4: Foreign Fighters Per Capita

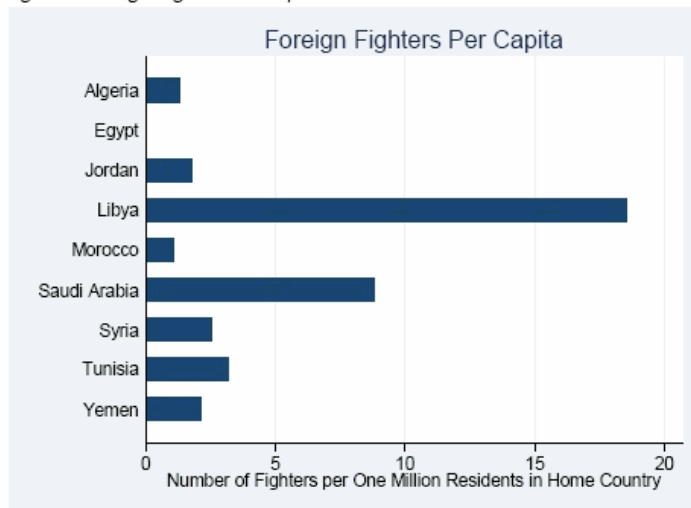
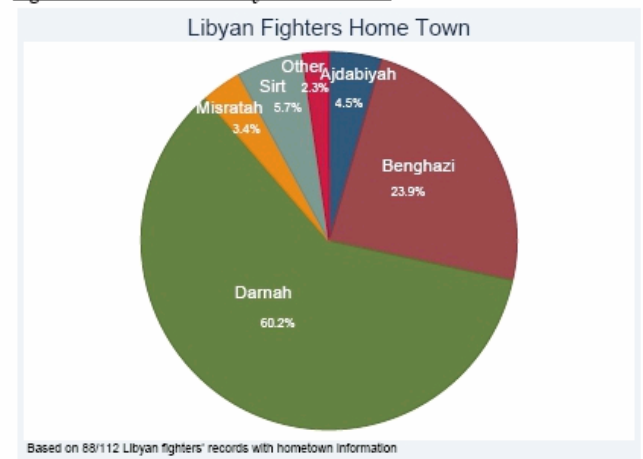


Figure 6: Most Common Libyan Hometowns



Source: <http://mylogicoftruth.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/westpointstats.jpg>

Figure 2. Libyan Jihadists Per Capita and by Hometowns as of 2005 During the Iraq War

14. TRAINING



Islamist militants in training

Source: U.S. Military

A March 2012 report in *Elkhabar* suggested that Libya has become the center of a network designed to send jihadists to Syria, where a jihad to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad's regime has been declared by the most influential Muslim clerics in the Arab Sunni world. The newspaper reported that a joint French and Algerian security services investigation

has identified 21 Algerians and five French citizens of North African descent among al-Qaeda's fighters in Syria. All of them allegedly went through Libya for training before traveling to Turkey with fake Libyan passports and crossing the border between Turkey and Syria. The newspaper further stated that al-Qaeda has opened at least two training camps in Libya—one near the town of Houn in the center of the country and the other believed to be close to Sahl 'Ajlah, south of Blue Mountain in eastern Libya. These facilities are designed to train volunteers for jihad from the Maghreb, Egypt, and Europe (Europeans of North African descent).⁴⁶

Other reports confirm *Elkhabar*'s allegations that al-Qaeda has used the lack of security to establish training camps in Libya. Indeed, al-Qaeda and former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group have converged on Darnah to train and organize. Hundreds of Islamic militants are in and around Darnah, and there are camps where weapons and physical training are available to activists. Senior al-Qaeda operative Abd al-Baset Azzouz, sent to the region last spring by al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, is among them and has been operating at least one training center. He sent some of his estimated 300 men to Brega to make contact with other militant Islamist groups farther west. Al-Zawahiri's plan for him is to establish a base for al-Qaeda in Libya. Azzouz has been close to al-Zawahiri since 1980 and first visited Afghanistan in the 1990s to join the mujahedin fight against the Soviet occupation. There are two military camps at Darnah, both occupied by Islamists known as the Brigade of al-Nour, but they are now "linked" to the Libyan Ministry of Interior.⁴⁷

Al-Qaeda militants are using the countries that toppled their leaders in the "Arab Awakening" as bases to train radical Western youths for potential attacks. A small number of British would-be jihadists are also making their way to Arab countries to seek training and opportunities for militant activity, as they do in Somalia and Yemen. Such an influx of fresh recruits will likely allow al-Qaeda to expand in numbers and capability, using training methodologies similar to those employed in Somalia and northern Mali. Key operatives such as

⁴⁶ Muhammad Ben Ahmad, "Al-Amn al-Faransi Yashtabihu Fi Tanaqhuli Faransiyyin Min Usul Magharibiyah Lil Qhital Fi Suria" [French Security Services Suspect French Citizens of North African Descent of Fighting in Syria], *Elkhabar* [Algiers], March 13, 2012, <http://www.elkhabar.com/ar/politique/283238.html> (accessed April 11, 2012). No other details are reported regarding these training camps in open sources.

⁴⁷ "L'inquiétude Grandit sur les Chiffres Djihadistes dans l'Est de la Libye" [Concern is Growing about the Numbers of Jihadists in Eastern Libya], *Françaises Nouvelles* [Paris], May 23, 2012, <http://www.francaisenouvelles.com/linquietude-grandit-sur-%E2%80%8B%E2%80%8Bles-chiffres-djihadistes-dans-lest-de-la-libye/> (accessed on August 17, 2012).

Azzouz will provide training in overarching ideology and niche skills, such as improvised explosive device (IED) construction.⁴⁸

The presence of training camps in Libya for would-be jihadists in Syria and elsewhere is not surprising despite the Libyan transitional government's denials, given the historical propensity of young Libyans for jihad and the lack of a strong central authority that could prevent such training from taking place. The Libyan prime minister, 'Abdel Rahim al-Kib, sternly rebuked Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin when the latter spoke of "a special training center for Syrian revolutionaries" who "are sent to Syria to attack the legal government" during a UN Security Council meeting in Libya. The prime minister did not, however, elaborate on the training-camp issue. Instead, he reiterated a pledge of political and financial support for the Syrian insurrection against President Assad's dictatorship.⁴⁹

15. METHODS OF OPERATION AND TACTICS



Jihadist leaders in Libya. From left to right: Ayman al-Zawahiri (the al-Qaeda supreme leader), 'Atiyah al-Libi (former al-Qaeda second in command, killed in 2011), Abu Yahya al-Libi (former al-Qaeda second in command, killed in 2012), 'Abdelmalek Droukdal (AQIM leader)

Source: U.S. Military

AQSL is employing a number of tactics as it seeks to achieve its ends, all of which are designed to weaken the central government and build support among the population for the sort of ideas and behavior conducive to al-Qaeda militant jihad. First, AQSL has emphasized vigilance and secrecy in an attempt to avoid scrutiny and a backlash that could derail the implementation of its plans in Libya. Before his death, 'Atiyah al-Libi commanded jihadists to adopt a low profile and to avoid premature acts that could distract them from their goals. As a

⁴⁸ "L'inquiétude Grandit sur les Chiffres Djihadistes dans l'Est de la Libye" [Concern is Growing about the Numbers of Jihadists in Eastern Libya].

⁴⁹ "Russia Accuses Libya of Harboring Syrian Rebels, Training Them to Attack Damascus," *Al Arabiya* [Dubai], March 8, 2012, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/03/08/199327.html> (accessed April 11, 2012).

result, al-Qaeda operatives in Libya have remained silent and unreported, letting their potential Salafist allies utilize the new postrevolutionary freedom of speech to promote the radical Islamist vision of al-Qaeda.⁵⁰

Such a secret and cautious approach may have allowed al-Qaeda to infiltrate militias and mosques without arousing government concern. Indeed, jihadist Salafists upholding al-Qaeda ideology in Libya are in control of dozens of mosques and prayer halls in the country. They are returnees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as elements of the former LIFG. They are preparing to announce their presence after the conclusion of consultations with AQSL. Among the returnees to Libya is Ahmad Abu-al-Rashid, whose real name is Nauri Husayn. Security reports indicate that he returned from Yemen and infiltrated through Somalia and Sudan. Available information affirms that jihadists such as Abu-al-Rashid indeed control militias composed of hundreds of people.⁵¹

Although the minister of religious affairs has complained of the “hijacking” of mosques by extremist imams imposed by militiamen, the Libyan transitional government continues to claim control of the situation and to deny that al-Qaeda has a presence in Libya, despite AQSL’s clear intent to undermine the authority of the Libyan central government through local armed militias controlled by Islamist extremists.⁵²

Indeed, AQSL has consistently called on former rebels to refuse to give up their arms no matter what the conditions, as a way, Abu Yahya al-Libi suggested, to safeguard their newly hard-won liberty and freedom and to resist the return to dictatorship—al-Libi ironically referred to the American constitutional right to bear arms as a basis for his argument. Such a call has, so far, been heeded. The Libyan army has remained weak and unable to settle the ongoing fighting

⁵⁰ ‘Atiyah al-Libi, “A-thawarat al-Arabiyyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad” [The Arab Revolutions and the Season of Harvest].

⁵¹ “Tanthim al-Qha’idah Yuhadiru Li’ilani Wujudih Ghariban Fi Libya” [Al-Qaeda is Getting Ready to Announce Soon its Presence in Libya].

⁵² “Wasir al-Awqhaf wa Shuun Diniya: al-Mutatarifun al-Mughtasibun Tad’amuhum Jihat Kharijiyyah” [Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs: Extremist Abusers Supported by Foreign Entities], *al-Watan* [Tripoli], April 16, 2012, <http://www.alwatan-libya.com/more-21366-1-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%20%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%20%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9%20> (accessed April 20, 2012).

between local militias in areas where ethnic and tribal divides are feeding armed confrontation, despite the government's declared pledge to reestablish order by force if necessary.⁵³

On the other hand, although the TNC has advocated a constitutional provision that will institute sharia as the unique source of law, radical Salafists continue to protest against the secular nature of the state, probably inspired by AQSL's propaganda. The latter has raised the stakes as far as sharia is concerned by calling on Libyan clerics to get involved in politics to ensure the Islamic character of the new constitution and to oppose those among the politicians whose attachment to Islam is not sincere, likely a reference to Muslim Brotherhood-type Islamists who typically attempt a balance between Islam and democracy.⁵⁴

Consequently, the TNC has appeared weak in confronting the two issues (the spread of arms and Islamist radicalization) that AQSL and its clandestine network are utilizing to consolidate and expand their position in Libya. While local militias are nowhere laying down their arms, at least in the short term, Salafist imams are mainstreaming their extreme version of Islam, as evidenced by reports regarding the reluctance of many mosques to participate in the usual annual celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, a heresy according to the Salafist school of thought.⁵⁵

To make matters even worse for the transitional government, which has called for national unity and national reconciliation, the al-Qaeda clandestine network is reportedly involved in killing former officials and public servants of the Qadhafi regime. Such involvement is likely part of the narrative of revenge and vilification of the former regime adopted by AQSL

⁵³ "Mustapha 'Abdel Jelil Yu-akidu ana al-Hukumah al-Intiqhaliyah Satafridu Saytarataha Walaw Bi Istikhdami al-Qhuwah" [Mustapha Abdel Jelil Reaffirms that the Transitional Government Will Impose Its Control by Force If Necessary], *al-Watan al-Libiyah* [Tripoli], April 5, 2012, <http://www.alwatan-libya.com/more-21144-1-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%89%20%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84%20%D9%8A%D8%A4%D9%83%D8%AF%20%D8%A3%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B6%20%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7%20%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%20%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A9%20%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%82%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%20%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%20%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9> (accessed April 24, 2012).

⁵⁴ Aaron Zelin and Andrew Lebovich, "Assessing Al-Qa'ida's Presence in the New Libya, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 22, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/assessing-al-qaidas-presence-in-the-new-libya> (accessed March 28, 2012).

⁵⁵ "Fi Tajahul Li Da'awat al-Mu'akisa: al-Libiyun Yahtafilun Bi al-Mawlid a-Nabawiyyi al-Sharif Kama lam Yahtafilu Min Ghabl" [Ignoring the Opposite Call: Libyans Celebrate the Birth of the Prophet Like Never Before], *Sahivat Barniqh* [Tripoli], February 4, 2012, <http://www.brnieq.com/news/?p=49944> (accessed April 4, 2012).

that certainly attracts a sizable audience, especially among disenchanted former rebels and clerics who suffered past abuses.⁵⁶

16. MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

Al-Qaeda's motivation probably remains the same—the creation of an affiliate in Libya to advance its global agenda, which is, at least in theory, the reestablishment of the Islamic caliphate. However, its diminished capabilities and tarnished image, resulting from U.S. and Western counterterrorism efforts, especially the constant surveillance and physical elimination of its top operatives in Pakistan, probably make this goal unattainable.

Al-Qaeda has built its reputation on its ability to conduct high-profile attacks against the United States and its allies that demonstrate its strength and position of leadership among Islamist jihadist organizations. But al-Qaeda has not conducted a high-profile terrorist attack in Western countries since the London bombing in the summer of 2005, despite the outcry for revenge that followed the killing of its charismatic leader, Osama bin Laden. In a tacit recognition of its limited capabilities, al-Qaeda's most prominent spokesmen forcefully endorsed, in June 2011, the so-called "individual jihad," the isolated acts of indoctrinated individuals such as Major Nidal Hasan in the United States and Mohamed Merah in France. Both of these individuals conducted deadly terrorist attacks targeting, respectively, military and civilian facilities, and both reportedly acted under the influence of al-Qaeda's propaganda and guidance. In the meantime, AQSL has warned potential individual jihadists to stay away from al-Qaeda's base in Pakistan to avoid detection.⁵⁷

Nonetheless, to stay relevant, AQSL has referred to the "Arab Awakening" and the Libyan Revolution in particular as a victory for itself by claiming to have been in the vanguard of the fight against Muslim autocrats and their Western allies that broke "the chains of fear" which, in their view, have kept Muslims under dictatorial governments. Although such a narrative may resonate in the Libyan community of jihadists, it may not develop into a structured

⁵⁶ Asmaa Elourfi, "Al-Qaeda Elements Surface in Derna," *Magharebia*, April 5, 2012.

⁵⁷ "Al-Qaeda – 10 years on," *Jane's Terrorism & Security Monitor* [Coulson, UK], September 1, 2011, http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/jtism/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/mags/jtism/history/jtism2011/jtism5542.htm@current&Prod_Name=JTSM&QueryText= (accessed March 28, 2012).

movement in the absence of the kind of charismatic leadership represented by former top al-Qaeda operatives, especially those of Libyan descent, all killed by U.S. drones.⁵⁸



A propaganda poster of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Source: U.S. Military

Like AQSL, AQIM has attempted to take advantage of the Libyan Revolution through a sustained propaganda campaign designed to influence the political dynamic and to establish a presence on the ground in order to recruit militants. In its online platform *al-Andalous*, AQIM's message, as shown in the above picture, has focused on solidarity and support for the "free fighters," Libyan "mujahidin," and "grand-sons of 'Umar al-Mukhtar," a legendary Libyan resistance fighter against Italian colonial occupation.

It is not clear, however, whether al-Qaeda and its North African affiliate have the same intent for Libya, nor is it evident that their efforts are coordinated. Although leaders of both organizations have multiple online messages that commonly emphasize the Islamic nature of the Libyan Revolution and its ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic state in Libya, the substance of their messages and those who deliver them have revealed different approaches that may indicate significant cultural differences. For example, AQSL's communicators are Libyans who

⁵⁸ 'Atiyah al-Libi, "A-thawarat al-Arabiyyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad" [The Arab Revolutions and the Season of Harvest].

have emphasized their local roots and have published specific and substantial guidance, whereas AQIM's leaders, all Algerians, have limited their message to rousing support and a broader call for unity and participation in jihadist activities.⁵⁹

AQIM's motivations in Libya may therefore differ from those pursued by AQSL. As noted by Noman Bentoman in the Quilliam Foundation report, Libya was originally not part of AQIM's field of action because al-Qaeda's leadership had assigned a different goal for the country. However, AQIM has paid a great deal of attention to the Libyan Revolution and benefited from the chaos the latter generated to acquire weapons, establish connections, and gain a presence on the ground. AQIM's assertiveness may indicate what many analysts have noted—that al-Qaeda's branches are becoming more influential than al-Qaeda itself.⁶⁰

17. PRINCIPAL AREAS OF OPERATION

Although al-Qaeda's clandestine network has remained silent, probably as an unspoken agreement with its partners in Libya, its presence has been evident in the east, especially in Darnah with Ansar al-Sharia and in the southeast in Kufra with Dir' Libya.

18. WEAPONS AND MATÉRIEL

The al-Qaeda clandestine network has certainly stocked enough arms and ammunitions to allow it to operate independently, given the wide availability of weapons in Libya. According to Sherif Elhelwa, an independent reporter, the Zintan brigade alone is "babysitting enough firepower to arm every extremist group in North Africa." Although the Zintan brigade has no established link with al-Qaeda, it could, like any other militia, provide arms and munitions to buyers or friendly groups in the "rebel" community, all of them thought to be infiltrated by local extremists and sympathizers of al-Qaeda.⁶¹

On the other hand, *katibas* believed to harbor al-Qaeda's grudges with the West and potentially connected to the al-Qaeda network in Libya retain a heavy and sophisticated arsenal, as shown by the following examples of weaponry of two such *katibas*.

⁵⁹ Aaron Zelin and Andrew Lebovich, "Assessing Al-Qa'ida's Presence in the New Libya," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, March 22, 2012, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/assessing-al-qaidas-presence-in-the-new-libya> (accessed March 28, 2012).

⁶⁰ Noman Benotman and James Brandon, "The Jihadist Threat in Libya."

⁶¹ Sherif Elhelwa, "Waiting for al-Qaeda in Libya", *IPT News*, April 16, 2012, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3537/waiting-for-al-qaeda-in-libya> (accessed April 20, 2012).



A mobile rocket launcher belonging to Katiba al-A'hrar Libya

Source: <http://fr-fr.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=330083127041913&set=a.226026860780874.71254.206982246018669&type=1&theater>



A self-propelled anti-aircraft gun belonging to Katiba al-A'hrar Libya

Source: <http://fr-fr.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=284367224946837&set=a.226026860780874.71254.206982246018669&type=1&theater>



A truck-mounted heavy machine gun belonging to Katiba al-A'hrar Libya

Source: <http://fr-fr.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=331819463534946&set=a.226026860780874.71254.206982246018669&type=1&theater>

The current state of the wide availability of arms in Libya will most likely remain as it is because the TNC's strategy of disarming former rebels has, so far, failed to yield significant results. Armed militias have refused to disarm without economic and political concessions that the TNC has appeared unable to satisfy. Despite threats by TNC President 'Abd al-Jelil to use force against disobedient militias, most observers tend to agree that it is impossible for the Libyan government to force the disarmament of militias.

19. FINANCES AND FUND-RAISING

Although information regarding financing of al-Qaeda in Libya was not found during this research, the belief is widespread that extremist Salafists are receiving funds from outside Libya, probably from the AQSL network of financiers or regular charity donors in the wealthy Gulf states.⁶²

⁶² "Wasir al-Awqaf wa Shuun Diniya: al-Mutatarifun al-Mughtasibun Tad'amuhum Jihat Kharijiyah" [Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs: Extremist Abusers Supported by Foreign Entities], *al-Watan* [Tripoli], April 16, 2012, <http://www.alwatan-libya.com/more-21366-1-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88>

20. POPULAR SUPPORT

AQSL's discourse may attract a sizable audience, especially among disenchanted former rebels, insecure tribal leaders, and Salafist clerics that could be turned into a support network and recruiting tool for jihadists. As demonstrated by ongoing rallies of supporters of the implementation of sharia, the Salafist movement is gaining ground in Libya and is most likely to adopt an uncompromising stance with regard to sharia and secularism close to the one typically promoted by al-Qaeda.⁶³

However, the local population typically rejects al-Qaeda's violent tactics, as indicated by the popular protests in Darnah demanding the departure of the Ansar al-Sharia militiamen, whom residents have blamed for the rising insecurity in their town.⁶⁴

21. NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Al-Qaeda's clandestine network is probably infiltrating local Islamist-oriented militias as a way of creating a system of local affiliates, which it likely intends to mobilize as needed to destabilize the central government and intimidate local communities. In June 2012, Ansar al-Sharia staged a large-scale rally and military show of force involving dozens of military vehicles, with Islamists wearing the Afghan mujahidin's traditional outfit. Some leaders described themselves as Islamists and called for implementation of sharia similar to that which the Taliban had implemented in Afghanistan or al-Qaeda in Somalia and Yemen. The military show of force consisted of a parade in which some 30 battalions from Benghazi, Darnah, Misrata, Al-Nufilyah, Ajdabiyah, and other Libyan towns took part in the first meeting in support of sharia in Benghazi. Islamist leaders pointed out that the aim of the military parade was to terrorize

%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9:%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%20%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%20%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9%20 (accessed April 20, 2012).

⁶³ "Mudharahrat Tayid Tahkim a-Shari'atou al-Islamiya" [Rally Supporting the Implementation of Sharia], *YouTube*, October 30, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9-tv4BNTgw> (accessed April 27, 2012).

⁶⁴ "Tanthim al-Qaeda Yuhadid Amna Darnah" [Al-Qaeda Threatens Safety in Darnah], *Libya al-Mustaqbal* [Tripoli], March 3, 2012, <http://www.libyaalmostakbal.net/news/clicked/20726> (accessed May 23, 2012).

(Arabic: *irhab*) those who do not want to be judged by God's law. Islamist leaders urged the Transitional National Council to clarify the identity of the state as Islamic or secular.⁶⁵

Such a system of local affiliates might use neighborhood mosques as a support infrastructure for a religious and popular movement that could frighten politicians attempting to run on a moderate Islamic platform. In so doing, it could hope to increase political acceptance of al-Qaeda's extreme version of Islam. A weak Islamist-dominated central government is unlikely to confront such a radical movement, at least in the short term. The minister of religious affairs expressed his government's weakness when he lamented the "hijacking" of mosques by extremist imams imposed by militiamen.⁶⁶

Two of these local Islamist-oriented militias—Ansar al-Sharia and al-A'hrar Libya—are the tip of the iceberg. They broadcast typical al-Qaeda-type propaganda on the Internet, and they have adopted the black flag, which symbolizes commitment to violent jihad promoted by AQSL. The images below show the resemblance between the emblem of al-Qaeda in Iraq and the logo of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. The Arabic—as well as the background on which it is written—is identical in both logos and reads as follows: "There is no God other than Allah and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah."

⁶⁵ "Khilala al-Multaqha al-Awal Li Ansar "Shari'a" Bi Banghazi ..Musalahunah Yasta'riduna Qhuwatahum..." [During the First Rally of Sharia's Supporters...Militiamen Display Their Force...], *Qhuraynah al-Jadidah* [Tripoli], June 14, 2012, <http://www.qurynanew.com/36582> (accessed August 20, 2012).

⁶⁶ "Wasir al-Awqhaf wa Shuun Diniya: al-Mutatarifun al-Mughtasibun Tad'amuhum Jihat Kharijiyah" [Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs: Extremist Abusers Supported by Foreign Entities], *al-Watan* [Tripoli], April 16, 2012, <http://www.alwatan-libya.com/more-21366-1-%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%81%20%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86%20%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%20%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%20%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA%20%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9%20> (accessed April 20, 2012).



Emblem of al-Qaeda in Iraq

Source: <http://asianconservatives.com/war/al-qaeda-flag-seen-displayedflying-in-libya/>



Ansar al-Sharia Logo

Source: <http://fr-fr.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=120981541351522&set=a.120981531351523.22115.120974264685583&type=1&theater>

The transitional government is expected to transfer power to an elected government once the results of the national elections held in July 2012 are validated. These elections may help clarify political and religious alignments—secular and Islamist alike. Although there were

concerns regarding the ability of the transitional government to organize free and fair elections because of security challenges posed by local militias, international observers and Libyan political actors have generally agreed that the electoral process was fairly conducted. The TNC's president also praised the elections and characterized them as fair and transparent; at the same time, he vowed to resign once the national assembly is put in place.⁶⁷

Although early electoral results show that liberals of the Alliance of National Forces won a sizable portion of the seats reserved to political parties—40 out of 120 seats—the final new political configuration will be determined by independent individuals who are disproportionately in favor of the Islamist agenda, according to Mohamed Swam, the leader of the Justice and Construction Party (JCP), the Muslim Brotherhood's political wing. The elected national assembly will draft a new constitution, which is expected to institute sharia as the supreme source of law. Indeed, the TNC has recommended that all parties agree on such a provision, most certainly as a way to avoid a religious divide in the political arena that could be exploited by Islamist extremists to weaken the legitimacy of the state.⁶⁸

Individuals rather than political parties will define the political future of Libya because Libyans, exposed to decades of political party-bashing propaganda, typically view organized political entities as suspect and divisive. This popular view is probably why the transitional government was slow and not straightforward when designing the legal framework that regulates organized political activism. The law regulating political parties was adopted less than two months before the first pluralist elections in Libya in more than four decades. The new regulation, which proscribes political association on the basis of religion, tribal, or regional affiliation, was ultimately not implemented, as evidenced by the formation of the JCP and the al-

⁶⁷ "Rais Lajnit Ta'emin al-Intikhabat: Ladayna Khuta Amniyah Li-Injahiha Fi Libya" [President of Elections Safety Commission: We Have a Plan to Secure the Elections], *Thawralibya* [Tripoli], April 25, 2012, http://www.hawralibya.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4430:2012-04-25-12-29-29&catid=77:policy&Itemid=510 (accessed April 25, 2012); "Intiqhali Libya Yatahayau Liteslimi a-Sultah" [The TNC Is Preparing to Hand over Power], *al-Manarah* [Tripoli], July 2, 2012, <http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/07/19924/%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%8a-%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a8% d9%8a%d8%a7-%d9%8a%d8%aa%d9%87%d9%8a%d8%a3-%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b3%d9%84%d9%8a%d9% 85-%d8%a7-%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%b7%d8%a9/> (accessed July 12, 2012).

⁶⁸ Omar Ashour, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Faces the Future," *Foreign Policy*, April 26, 2012, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/09/libya_s_muslim_brotherhood_faces_the_future (accessed April 26, 2012); "Al-Islamiyun Yuakidun Anahum Sayahsiluna 'Ala Al-Aghlabiyah" [The Islamists Confirmed They Will Obtain the Majority], *al-Manarah* [Tripoli], July 11, 2012, <http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/07/19883/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85%d9%8a%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%8a%d8%a4%d9%83%d8%af%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%87%d9%85-%d9%8a%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%b7%d9%8a%d8%b9%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b5/> (accessed July 12, 2012).

Watan party, whose Islamist orientation appears obvious. The law is, however, thought to be directed primarily against the Salafists, who have not yet organized themselves into a formal political party.⁶⁹

However, the Salafists may attempt to organize in the same way as their counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia did. It is unlikely that they will leave the political arena to the moderate Muslim Brotherhood, which they view as unrepresentative of true political Islam. AQSL will likely attempt to infiltrate any such Salafist organization by using its local operatives and connections and to utilize it as a platform to advance its strategic goal of establishing a strong presence in Libya.⁷⁰

22. TRANSNATIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND SUPPORT

Like AQSL, AQIM has shown great interest in the Libyan Revolution. AQIM's leaders have praised and congratulated the Libyan rebels for their victory, referring to them as *mujahidin* and "grandsons" of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, an anticolonial figure, as a way of linking the Libyan Revolution with anticolonial jihad, which is a central tenet of AQIM's jihadist discourse. While they called on Libyans to distrust NATO, AQIM's leaders promised to join in combat only in case of a foreign ground invasion and did not take credit for any participation in the Libyan rebellion, probably in an attempt to demonstrate support without giving the impression of meddling in the internal affairs of the Libyan rebels.⁷¹

Probably in line with AQSL's penchant for secrecy, AQIM has denied any direct involvement in the Libyan rebellion, and its message is inclusive of all rebels. Its apparent intent is to focus on local alliances, likely with militias close to its Islamist paradigm, as a way of extending its safe haven and procuring weapons for its ongoing jihadist operations in Algeria and northern Mali. For instance, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the AQIM leader in the Sahel, was reportedly in Libya and allegedly attended the al-Qaeda-type parade in Sirt as the guest of Wisam Ben Hamid, the leader of Katiba al-A'hrar Libya. Belmokhtar was the first AQIM leader to acknowledge the Libyan Revolution's advantages for his organization, specifically in terms of

⁶⁹ "Libya Bans Religious Political Parties," *BBC* [London], April 25, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17844280> (accessed April 26, 2012).

⁷⁰ "Mudharahrat Tayid Tahkim a-Shari'atou al-Islamiya" [Rally Supporting the Implementation of Sharia], *YouTube*, October 30, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9-tv4BNTgw> (accessed April 27, 2012).

⁷¹ Aaron Zelin and Andrew Lebovich, "Assessing Al-Qa'ida's Presence in the New Libya."

procurement of weapons, and the two movements share a commitment to jihad for the sake of establishing the rule of God on earth.⁷²

In a different direction, Ansar al-Sharia may become the new brand name under which jihadist groups in the Arab world seek to organize. In a June 2012 essay, published on *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*, Abu al-Mundhir al-Shingiti, a prominent Mauritanian Salafist-jihadist cleric, called on Islamist jihadists to adopt the name as a vehicle for unity. This new designation appears to be an attempt to create a new framework of activism that expands the concept of jihad beyond armed confrontation to include traditional forms of proselytism, known as *da'awa*. Such an expansion would allow jihadists to take advantage of the new freedom that the “Arab Awakening” has provided in many Arab countries to organize and to build popular support. The name is being used by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in so-called liberated areas of Yemen and by Salafists in Tunisia.⁷³

Although the level of contact among these local groups is not clear, it is probable that Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and in Tunisia are communicating, a fact that points to possible coordination between the two groups. Indeed, their *Facebook* sites appear similar in design and content, and their leaders, Ben Qhumu and Sayfallah Bin Hussein, alias Ayyadh al-Tunsi, likely know each other because they were both al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan and former Guantanamo detainees. It is, however, worth mentioning that the two groups have emphasized different goals, probably because of differences in the socio-political contexts in which they operate. While Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, where a democratic institutional process has taken place, has emphasized peaceful means of activism, the Libyan group has appeared clearly more oriented toward violence, despite its attempt to publicize charity work.⁷⁴

⁷² “Amir Katibat al-Mulethemini Fi Muqhabalatin Muthirah Ma’a Akhbar nwakshut” [Al-Mulethemini Katiba’s Emir in an Interview with Nouakchott Info [Information]], *ANI* [Nouakchott], November 12, 2011, <http://www.ani.mr/?menuLink=37693cfc748049e45d87b8c7d8b9aacd&idInterview=97> (accessed April 11, 2012).

⁷³ Abu al-Mundhir al-Shingiti, “Nahnu Ansar al-Shari’ah” [We, the Supporters of Sharia], *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad* [jihadist Web site], June 2012, <http://tawhed.ws/dl?i=18061202> (accessed August 28, 2012).

⁷⁴ “Ansar al-Sharia Discloses Its Leader’s Name,” *YemenPost* [San’a], April 29, 2012, <http://yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=5256> (accessed August 17, 2012); Aaron W. Zelin, “Tarek Maaroufi: Tunisia’s Most Notorious Jihadist, Returns Home,” *TunisiaLive* [Tunis], April 1, 2012, <http://www.tunisia-live.net/2012/04/01/tarek-maaroufi-tunisia%E2%80%99s-most-notorious-jihadist-returns-home/> (accessed August 28, 2012).

23. USE OF COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

AQSL and AQIM's leadership have both focused their online communications on Libya, probably seen as their best opportunity to advance their respective agendas in the Arab world and the Sahel. Both organizations have significantly increased the number and substance of their messages targeting Libya since the start of its revolution.⁷⁵

AQSL has made wide use of its Libyan members in support of its media strategy in Libya, doubtless to take advantage of their cultural connections with their countrymen and to stimulate Libyan nationalism by utilizing the leadership position of Libyans in the international community of jihadists. Its main communicators have been Abu Yahya al-Libi and 'Atiyah al-Libi—both Libyans as their patronymic names indicate. 'Atiyah revealed his Misrata origins for the first time in 2011, doubtless to connect with a local identity that Libyans have increasingly valued over their national identity. Misrata city is home to a powerful militia that was instrumental in the fight against the Qadhafi regime, and it is expected to play a major role in the post-revolutionary political configuration. 'Atiyah provided key guidance to Libyan rebels before his death in August 2011. He especially offered al-Qaeda's perspective on the Arab revolutions in an essay entitled "Thawarat al-'Arabiyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad" (The Arab Revolutions and the Time of Harvest).⁷⁶

AQIM could not adopt the same strategy, probably because its leadership is composed almost exclusively of Algerians. However, AQIM's leaders praised and congratulated the Libyans for their revolution, calling them the "descendents" or "grandsons" of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, in reference to the late hero of Libyan resistance to Italian colonial rule. In October 2011, AQIM's leader, 'Abdelmalek Droukdal, warned Western powers against sending ground troops to Libya while calling on the rebels to focus in the critical period after the fall of Qadhafi and on the establishment of a "regime based on sharia." He also called on Libyans to resist foreign hegemony and not to trust the TNC.⁷⁷

Both AQSL and AQIM have emphasized the Islamic character of the Libyan Revolution and warned against complacency and disunity in the critical postrevolutionary phase that could

⁷⁵ Zelin and Lebovich, "Assessing Al-Qa'ida's Presence in the New Libya."

⁷⁶ "Thawarat al-'Arabiyah wa Mawsimu al-Hasad" [The Arab Revolutions and the Time of Harvest], *al-Malahim wal Fiten* [jihadist Web site], September 12, 2011, <http://alfetn.com/vb3/showthread.php?t=56267> (accessed April 4, 2012).

lead to deviation from the ultimate goal of creating an Islamic state. They have also called for the inalienable right to bear arms as the only way to protect the nation from the return of dictatorship.

Al-Qaeda's message is actually close to the mainstream Islamic discourse that emerged from the Libyan Revolution and may indicate its attempt to blend into the Islamist movement that is expected to dominate Libyan politics. Although the TNC's president declared that sharia will be the prime source of legislation in the country, raising the eyebrows of his Western backers, Islamist radicals are not convinced of his real intentions, as evidenced by protests calling for the implementation of sharia.

The call for an Islamic state will probably increase as the fragmentation of state authority continues under the pressure of local militias competing for influence and for economic and political gains in the new Libya. Indeed, Islam may be perceived as the only common factor that could cement national unity, threatened by the rising influence of ethnicity and local interests.

Online communications may also have helped al-Qaeda's ideologue send fatwas in the form of questions and answers. *Ennahar*, an Algerian online publication, reported that Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, a known al-Qaeda ideologue and mufti of the jihadist Web site *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*, responded to questions, likely from Libyan rebels, regarding the legality of killing former officials of the Qadhafi regime who joined the opposition, and the answer was "yes." The Algerian publication postulated that such a fatwa may have given the green light to kill 'Abdel Fattah Yunus in July 2011. Yunus, formerly Qadhafi's defense minister, defected in the early stage of the rebellion and became the leader of the TNC's military wing.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ismail Fellah, "Drukdel Threatens to Burn the Armies of France and NATO in Libya," *Ennahar* [Algiers], October 4, 2011, <http://www.ennaharonline.com/en/news/7387.html> (accessed April 2, 2012).

⁷⁸ "Murasalat Siriyah Bayna Thuwaru Libya wa Munathir al-Qha'ida" [Secret Correspondences between Libyan Rebels and an Al-Qaeda's Ideologue], *Ennahar* [Algiers], July 23, 2011, <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/specialpages/international/84825-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%91%D8%B1%E2%80%AE-%E2%80%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9%E2%80%AE%E2%80%AC.html> (accessed April 4, 2012).



Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi

Source: *Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad*

24. TERRORIST THREAT ASSESSMENT

Al-Qaeda appears to constitute a significant threat to the state-building process in Libya. The current Libyan leadership seems unable to deliver on the promise of security or to carry out meaningful reforms in order to build strong popular support for state institutions, destroyed by the former regime. The election of members of the National Congress, who will appoint a new cabinet, is unlikely to generate strong national leadership, given the lack of political parties with established ideological principles and solid popular support. The National Congress will most likely be dominated by local notables and prominent former rebels with narrow agendas and patronage networks who can be manipulated and/or intimidated by organized, committed, and secretive groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates.⁷⁹

In addition, the Libyan government is not likely to succeed, at least in the short term, in disarming former rebels or ensuring that radical Islamists do not infiltrate the state security services in order to sabotage future counterterrorism efforts. So far, the army and the police have reconstituted their ranks by incorporating whole militias regardless of the militants'

⁷⁹ Sean Kane, "Throw Out the Playbook for Libya's Elections," *Foreign Policy*, January 20, 2012, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/01/20/throw_out_the_playbook_for_libyas_elections?wpisrc=obinsite (accessed April 26, 2012).

backgrounds. The government has yielded to the pressure of the militias, which categorically rejected recruitment into the army and police on the basis of individual qualifications.

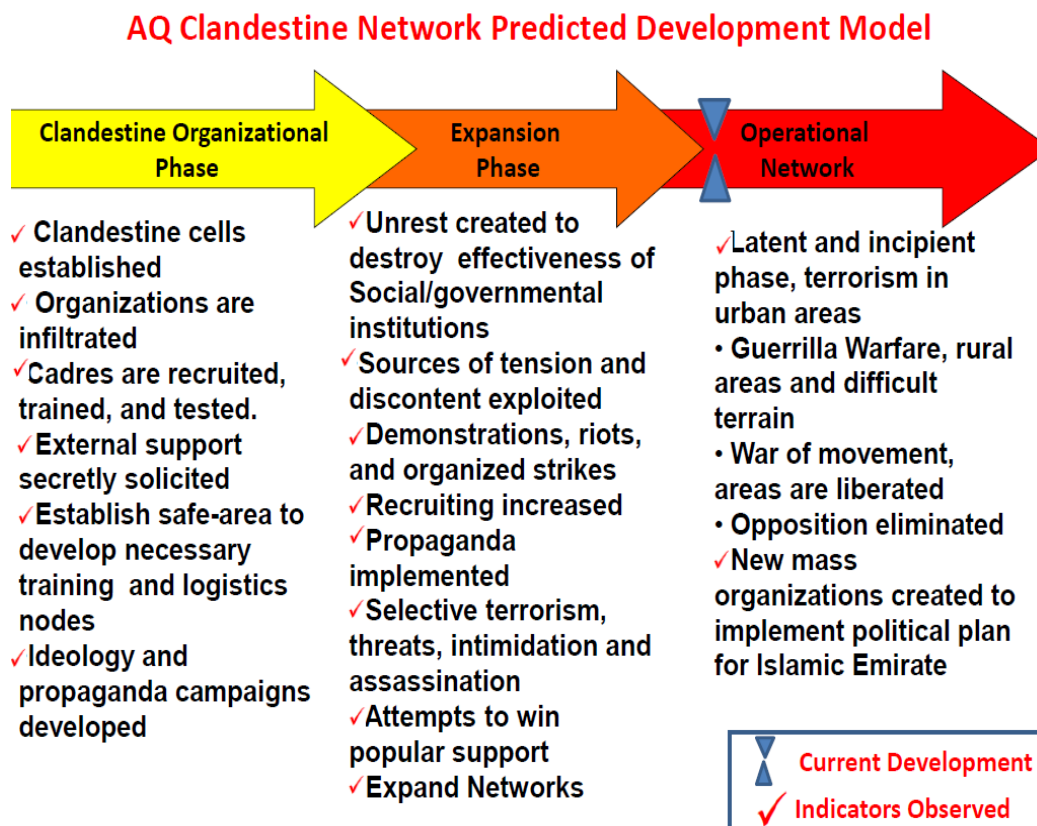
The heterogeneous composition of the Libyan army will probably pose the enduring prospect of military insubordination and a lack of a structured chain of command—possibilities that might allow non-state actors to build armed capabilities and establish safe havens. This development is especially likely if one considers the regional divide and the rise of local ethnic groups with long-held grievances against the state. Al-Qaeda's clandestine network may attempt to exacerbate these divisions as a way of preventing stability and the consolidation of government authority.

On the other hand, the July 2012 elections will probably not yield strong political leadership and a large representative government. Mahmoud Jibril, the leader of the Alliance of National Forces—the liberal coalition that won the largest share of the National Congress's seats allocated to political parties—has called for the constitution of a national-unity government to consolidate democracy and pluralist political representation. However, his main rival, Mohamed Swam, the leader of the JCP, has not appeared to be attracted by the prospect of a partnership with the liberals. Swam accused the liberals of benefiting from the support of the so-called *azlam Nitham* (remnants of the ousted regime) and noted fundamental differences between his party and the liberals. Furthermore, independents, who represent three-fifths of the National Congress, may attempt to form a government coalition that could marginalize political parties.

In such a state of uncertainty, an organized Salafist movement could pose a serious challenge, especially given the expected national debate over the constitution and the place of sharia in the public sphere. The TNC has advised the political elite to accept without debate the inclusion of a provision instituting sharia as the main source of legislation in the future constitution, probably in an attempt to deny the Salafists an opportunity to exploit such a debate for political gains. Meanwhile, it drafted a law that bans religious parties, thought to be especially directed at preventing the formation of a Salafist political party. However, these tactics are unlikely to contain the rise of the Salafists as a political bloc, given the divisions among the political elite and the weakness of state authority.

As a result, the current status quo will most likely continue, and as it does, it will weaken the government and empower dissent. In this context, the al-Qaeda clandestine network is unlikely to be confronted by the government, and it will likely expand, especially in the south

and east, where separatist movements opposed to the central government exist. The following is a predicted development model of the network in Libya:



Source: U.S. Military

Finally, al-Qaeda's clandestine network in Libya will probably continue to provide critical support to AQIM, especially with regard to arms procurement and safe passage of militants, which are essential to sustain AQIM's war in northern Mali. These arms and militants are critically needed to maintain the strategic advance that AQIM and its allies, the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) and Ansar-Din (Supporters of the Religion), achieved when they expelled the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (local name for the territory historically inhabited by the Tuareg) from the main cities in the north of Mali in June 2012. Since then, AQIM and its allies have controlled the northern two-thirds of Mali, and the region has become an autonomous land in which terrorists roam, train, and plot.

25. INFORMATION GAPS (IN SOURCES)

Although an al-Qaeda clandestine network is most likely operating in Libya, the extent of its network and organization is largely unreported and has therefore remained unknown because of the secretive nature of its implementation, as directed by AQSL. For instance, the whereabouts of Abu Anas al-Libi, the builder of al-Qaeda's network in Libya, are unknown, as are those of his close subordinates. Also unknown are the number and location of militants he has already recruited.

Islamist extremists with al-Qaeda-type discourse have a significant presence in local militias and among the Libyan Salafists who are organizing themselves into a powerhouse that the government cannot ignore. It is not yet clear, however, whether the Libyan Salafists will eventually be allowed to form a political entity, as in Egypt, or if they will remain a network of charities and mosques, as is the case in many Arab countries. Either way, they will enjoy substantial popular support that al-Qaeda's clandestine network will likely attempt to utilize to expand and strengthen its capabilities. The extent of the Salafists' popular support, however, remains so far unknown, as do their connections with the al-Qaeda clandestine network, whose existence the transitional government continues to flatly deny.

An al-Qaeda clandestine network is likely to raise funds from like-minded Salafists. Although it is widely thought that Salafists, especially those in Arab countries transitioning to democracy, receive funds from Gulf states, no specific information regarding such funding for Libya was found in the course of this research.

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27. APPENDIX



Source: <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/libya-political-map.htm>