A Strategy for Success in Libya

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Executive Summary

America needs a new policy in Libya. The current approach is failing and will likely leave a permanent safe haven for ISIS and al Qaeda on Europe's southern border. This future will strengthen the global Salafi-jihadi movement, facilitate future attacks against the US homeland and Europe, and require a perpetual American counterterrorism campaign in Libya.

The cost of continuing targeted strikes in Libya indefinitely is significant. Drones, manned aircraft, surveillance and reconnaissance, analysts and operators, and smart munitions are expensive. Allocating them to Libya deprives other theaters of their support. Relying on such a strategy, even if it were succeeding, is cheaper than a more active intervention only in the short term. Decades of such a strategy have shown how unlikely it is to succeed and that the likely costs of pursuing it are even greater.

The Libyan crisis is not confined to Libya. The breakdown of the Libyan state since 2011 has destabilized US allies and partners throughout Northern Africa, fueled geopolitical competitions, and exacerbated the European migrant crisis.

Yet the US faces an opportunity in Libya today as well as a challenge. Libya is a large territory but has a small population of around six million people, mostly concentrated along a narrow coastal strip. Security is poor, and Salafi-jihadi groups are strong—but the situation is not nearly as bad as in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, or even Somalia. Committing a relatively small amount of resources in support of a holistic strategy could permanently end a threat to American and European security, stop the destabilization of key North African states, and deal a significant blow to the Salafi-jihadi movement globally.

Why the US Must Act in Libya Now

There is no Libyan state today. The country has been trapped in a cycle of instability since revolution and NATO intervention ended Muammar al Qaddafi's four-decade rule in 2011. Qaddafi's fall unleashed destabilizing currents that his manipulation of Libyan society had fostered and repressed. Peace agreements and transitional governments failed repeatedly, and the country descended into civil war. Libya now has three rival governments and an ever-growing web of militias that compete for control of its cities and oil. An oft-revived UN peace process is unlikely to resolve the conflict.

Libya's collapse was a prime opportunity for Salafi-jihadi groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS. Weapons from Qaddafi's arsenal flowed to militants across Africa and the Middle East.[1] Al Qaeda and later ISIS established branches in Libya, where they recruit and train fighters, profit from trafficking, base leadership, and prepare attacks on neighboring states and Europe. Libyan governance gaps and security vacuums also allow Salafi-jihadi groups to control and govern populations in support of their long-term goal of transforming Muslim societies. Libya is one of a very few places worldwide where the global Salafi-jihadi movement can perform these core functions on a meaningful scale.

American interests in Libya transcend the Salafi-jihadi threat. Russia is seeking influence in Libya to pressure Europe, challenge America's relationship with Egypt, and project military force into the southern Mediterranean. Libya is also a theater for power competitions among North African and Middle Eastern states, with American allies and partners on both sides. Libya is a key transit node for the migrant flows destabilizing Europe.

Today's Libya is bad; tomorrow's will be much worse. Salafi-jihadi groups are consolidating safe

havens in the Libyan desert. The country is becoming a priority destination[2] for militants fleeing losses in other theaters and preparing to infiltrate Europe. Libya has already helped destabilize Tunisia and weakened Egypt and Algeria. The US can ill afford crises in those populous neighbors that are vital allies. Libya is also a looming humanitarian tragedy, and the international community is scarcely equipped to handle more crises or migration.

The US has underestimated Libya's importance before[3] and cannot afford to do so again. Now is the time to act—before the worst-case scenarios become reality.

Wrong Problem, Wrong Strategy

Recent US policy in Libya has focused on helping local actors expel ISIS from ground it had captured, disrupting ISIS plotting of external attacks, and containing instability in Libya to a limited extent. The US, which has no diplomatic presence in Libya after the 2012 Benghazi debacle and 2014 closure of the US embassy in Tripoli, has provided limited diplomatic support for a UN-backed unity government. American forces have conducted intermittent military operations to target external threat nodes and deny ISIS control of terrain.

The current policy prioritizes short-term defense over long-term success. It has failed to stabilize Libya and defeat ISIS, and it has perpetuated the conditions that fuel recruitment for Salafi-jihadi groups. The focus on ISIS also ignores the full extent of the Salafi-jihadi threat in Libya, which includes a significant al Qaeda presence that US strategy does not meaningfully address.

The flaws of this strategy stem from a misunderstanding of the terrorist threat. The terrorist groups in Libya that threaten the US—al Qaeda, ISIS, and their affiliates—are manifestations of the global Salafi-jihadi movement. Their ultimate goal is violently transforming Muslim societies to establish a polity under a fundamentalist interpretation of *shari'a*.[4] They use terrorist attacks when they believe those are most effective, but they also use conventional war,

insurgency, and nonmilitary activities that we would normally call stabilization, reconstruction, and dispute resolution if they were not being carried out by our enemies. The US must finally recognize in Libya as elsewhere that defining our adversaries as terrorists and pursuing a purely counterterrorism strategy will lead to failure.

The US simply cannot win this fight with bombs alone. Any successful strategy must focus on securing the Libyan population against the Salafi-jihadi movement. That movement becomes strong when it forges connections with populations. These connections are possible when weak or vulnerable communities face existential threats that render them unable to resist Salafi-jihadi groups or force them to turn to such groups for governance or defense. In Libya, the source of these threats is civil conflict. The breakdown of Libyan state and society after 2011 allowed Salafi-jihadi groups to infiltrate and seize Libyan communities. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi haven is growing more permanent as these groups build more enduring ties amid persistent instability.

Securing the Libyan population against the Salafi-jihadi movement requires resolving the active conflict and closing governance and security gaps at the local level. The US must shift the paradigm shaping its counterterrorism policy to forestall a worsening threat from Libya and set the larger fight—against the Salafi-jihadi movement—on the path to victory.

What to Do

The US must implement a strategy to resolve the Libyan political crisis and close governance and security gaps at the substate level. This strategy aims to remove the underlying conditions that drive both regional instability and the growth of the Salafi-jihadi movement.[5] It requires accomplishing five key tasks:

- Support a negotiated political settlement to produce an acceptable governance and security structure;

- Identify, train, advise, and assist Libyan partner forces in destroying Salafi-jihadi threats and securing Libyan territory and communities;

- Enable communities to isolate Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals;

- Eliminate incentives for actors to continue the conflict; and

- Pressure regional states to cease military engagement and support an inclusive political settlement.

American leadership is required to achieve a durable solution in Libya. The US should take a leading role, with allies and partners, in resolving the Libyan civil war and establishing governance and security at the local level. This holistic approach must be paired with an effort by the US, allies, and partners to defeat Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya and eliminate their safe havens. The concept of operations aims to create pockets of stability that ultimately support establishment of acceptable governance and security across all of Libya. It comprises four synchronous lines of effort:

- **Political.** The US with allies and partners conducts simultaneous top-down and bottom-up diplomatic engagement to resolve the Libyan political crisis.

- **Substate.** The US, allies, and partners deliver critical services through Libyan structures to close governance gaps and prevent a humanitarian crisis.

- **Security.** US and allied forces train, advise, and assist Libyan security forces to secure the population and defeat Salafi-jihadi groups.

- **Environment.** The US and allies apply diplomatic, military, and economic levers to eliminate incentives for various actors to prolong the conflict in Libya.

Other approaches will fail. Outsourcing the Libya problem to allies and partners will continue to fail because of the role that geopolitical competition plays in perpetuating the Libyan conflict. Backing a strongman in Libya will also fail because it would reinforce the grievances that strengthen the Salafi-jihadi movement and benefit US adversaries for the sake of short-term stability. Such short-term strategies will prove costly in the long term because they will require a continuous cycle of US intervention to counter perennial threats.

This report seeks to provide a strategic framework for US policymakers and practitioners to secure minimum vital interests in Libya. It therefore focuses solely on US interests and priorities. This focus must not obscure the will or interests of the Libyan people, who are crucial to the success of a strategy that rests on conflict resolution and governance.

This report presents an assessment of the Libyan theater and the major players involved for the purpose of recommending a strategic approach rather than developing an executable plan. Any such plan will require additional nuance that accounts for variations among communities and individuals, as well as the development of concrete force-sizing and force-composition requirements that are beyond the scope of this planning effort.

Finally, this assessment is based on the major characteristics of the Libya conflict. The situation in Libya may evolve by time of publication, but the core assessments that underpin the recommended strategy are unlikely to change significantly.

Reframing US Policy in Libya

The US must get Libya right. Salafi-jihadi groups including al Qaeda and ISIS operate from Libyan safe havens today. They are entrenching themselves within the Libyan population, establishing a solid base from which to threaten the US and European homelands and interests. Insecurity in Libya destabilizes Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt—all of which already face major internal challenges. Regional states are vying for influence and the ability to shape the future of the Libyan state. Russia is also seeking positions in Libya from which to operate in the southern Mediterranean.[6] Criminal human trafficking networks that move migrants from throughout Africa through Libya to Europe depend on the absence of a viable Libyan state and central government. Libya is a threat to American interests and an opportunity for America's enemies.

Libya is a key node for the global Salafi-jihadi movement.[7] The Libyan base provides the global movement with a destination for jihad, a transit and training zone, and a key node for global foreign fighter flows. It is already an important enabler for the global Salafi-jihadi threat against the United States, Europe, and American interests.

Al Qaeda and ISIS are consolidating a safe haven in Libya from which they will directly threaten the West over the long term. This threat against Americans in the region and the European homeland is already manifest: the 2012 attack on US diplomatic sites in Benghazi, the 2013 Ain Amenas hostage crisis, and the 2017 suicide bombing in Manchester among others.[8] The threat will increase as the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base[9]—the network of people and groups that uses violence to establish Islamic governance—adapts and expands amid continued instability, further embedding itself in Libyan communities. Parts of this base will always focus on local matters, but the entire Salafi-jihadi system in Libya

supports and gives sanctuary to the elements that seek to attack the West.

Libya exports instability that threatens other weak states, destabilizes regional powerhouses, and exacerbates regional power competitions—all of which harm American interests in the region. Libya's collapse hurt the economies of Egypt and Tunisia when tens of thousands of migrant workers returned from Libya.[10] Al Qaeda and ISIS have attacked Algeria and Tunisia from their Libyan safe havens, harming the tourism and energy sectors.[11] The fall of the Qaddafi regime set off a chain reaction that sparked the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali, starting a cycle of conflict that facilitated al Qaeda's spread throughout the Sahel and that required French military intervention to prevent the establishment of yet another al Qaeda-controlled quasi-state.[12]

Libya has become a front in regional power struggles, driving wedges between important American allies and partners. Egypt, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and others back rival proxies in the Libyan conflict to secure influence over the future Libyan state. US partners are at odds in Libya, and the contest is most visible in ideas about the role of political Islam.[13] Traditional rivalries, such as between Egypt and Algeria for regional dominance, are also coming alive again.[14]

A surge in migrants crossing the Mediterranean from Libya compounded the stress of refugee flows from Iraq and Syria on European states. The end of Qaddafi-era controls uncorked massive migrant flows. The overwhelming majority of migrants are Sub-Saharan Africans seeking better opportunities in Europe by attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy.[15] Syrian refugees have also traveled to Europe through Libya.[16] Many of these migrants and refugees would find it difficult to cross to Europe if a viable state ruled in Libya. Libya is by far the weakest link

of the southern Mediterranean states, which include Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt.

US adversaries seek to advance their strategic interests by leveraging low-cost, high-reward openings in Libya. The Russian play in Libya is a geopolitical game disguised as a counterterrorism mission. It is part of a larger Russian plan to contest the Mediterranean by establishing military positions in Syria, Egypt, and Libya.[17] Russia is also leveraging its limited investment in Libya to bolster its ties to Egypt and gain influence over Italy.[18] Russia seeks economic benefits from unfulfilled Qaddafi-era contracts as well.[19] China also aims to secure reconstruction contracts in Libya as part of a broader campaign to increase its influence in Africa.[20]

America's Opportunity in Libya

Success in Libya could be a valuable win for the US. The US has an opportunity to conduct a limited engagement in Libya that will secure its interests and pay future dividends. The costs and risks of such engagement are low relative to other conflict zones in the region, which have much larger and more divided populations,[21] greater violence, more geopolitical competition, and less economic potential. Libya's problems by contrast are complex but manageable.

Success in Libya would also strengthen American power on the world stage by demonstrating leadership and affirming that events such as the 2012 Benghazi tragedy cannot deter the US from securing its interests and advancing global security. Finally, Libya is an opportunity for the US to develop a new strategic paradigm for defeating Salafi-jihadi movements with a limited military and financial commitment that will advance necessary changes to American counterterrorism policy across all theaters.

The US Approach in Libya

Since 2014, the US has focused on fighting ISIS in Libya and, very secondarily, on preventing further state collapse. The US approach in Libya is similar to its approach in Yemen and Somalia, among other places: avoid direct involvement, back an international effort to establish a recognized central government with which to partner against ISIS (or al Qaeda), and target ISIS (or al Qaeda) directly with limited direct attacks. The US has therefore largely followed and supported the UN lead in Libya to facilitate the political transition from the Qaddafi regime to a new Libyan government. Libya also became one of the live theaters for US military action against ISIS under the global counter-ISIS coalition.

The 2012 Benghazi attack and the 2014 closing of the US embassy in Tripoli interrupted US policy initiatives in support of Libya's postrevolutionary transition. The US had shifted from humanitarian support toward more robust political initiatives and security assistance before the drawdown.[22] Intensive US diplomacy supported the formation of the UN-brokered unity government in 2015.[23] However, even with outside support, the new unity government could not bring all parties to the table to resolve the Libyan political crisis. The US continues to conduct governance building and development assistance on a much more limited scale, severely handicapped by the absence of an American diplomatic presence.

As elsewhere, the counterterrorism mission in Libya has taken primacy over all other objectives in Libya. The US gave military assistance and air support to militias that had allied with the unity government to defeat ISIS in late 2016.[24] The Trump administration has reinforced this prioritization, focusing American engagement in Libya even more on military operations against ISIS.[25] US subordination of other national security interests to the counter-ISIS mission benefits al Qaeda, criminals and traffickers, and Russia. It locks the US into an indefinite cycle of anti-ISIS air campaigns and military action that will never lead to a permanent resolution.

Redefining Counterterrorism. The resumption of ISIS attacks in Libya should be a clear sign that bombing is insufficient to defeat Salafi-jihadi groups.[26] US policy needs a reset to secure US interests in Libya and advance what should be a priority US objective—defeating the global Salafi-jihadi movement.[27]

The US is fighting its enemies incorrectly—in Libya and elsewhere—in part because it misidentifies them as terrorists instead of insurgents. Network and leadership targeting might be sufficient if ISIS and al Qaeda were only small terrorist groups. However, ISIS and al Qaeda are part of a global insurgency—the Salafi-jihadi movement.[28] This movement endeavors to destroy Muslim societies by force and reform them according to a fundamentalist interpretation of *shari'a*. Al Qaeda and ISIS use terrorist attacks as one of many methods to divide and deter the West in service to this overarching objective. Even the US targeting of al Qaeda and ISIS cells focused on external attacks only temporarily disrupts the threat of direct attack against the US and European homelands.[29]

Insurgent groups, unlike terrorist cabals, require connections to a population.[30] They forge ties with local communities in conditions of conflict or by usurping popular grievances. Libya's 2011 revolution provided the initial opportunity for Salafi-jihadi groups to build these relations when they joined the fight against the Qaddafi regime. They cemented this relationship by providing services and governance after the collapse of the Libyan state, when the West withdrew, leaving no other group that could compete with the limited capabilities of the Salafi-jihadi groups. Libya's descent into chaos left communities vulnerable, with little ability to resist infiltration or outright takeover. These conditions led to the unprecedented growth of the Salafi-jihadi base, the collection of people and groups from which groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda draw their strength.[31]

US policy in Libya needs to address the reality of this threat. The key to success lies in breaking the relationship between the Salafi-jihadi base and the Libyan people.[32] It requires focusing on people, not terrain. Military victories can generate significant effects, but they are not durable as long as conflict and grievances persist.[33] ISIS in Libya is an instructive example. The US-backed campaign to recapture terrain from ISIS temporarily weakened the group, but ISIS is now reconstituting in Libya. The persistence of the political conflict, including the deep polarization and social dysfunction, facilitates ISIS's return.[34]

The US must stop defining the threats by actor (e.g., ISIS and al Qaeda) and seeking to combat these actors sequentially. The US is at risk, as in Syria, of pursuing the defeat of ISIS in Libya in a way that benefits al Qaeda and the broader Salafi-jihadi base.[35] The rise of ISIS in Libya did not diminish al Qaeda in Libya, but rather pulled US policy attention away from the al Qaeda threat. The al Qaeda network branded itself as a more palatable alternative to ISIS and can now absorb ISIS defectors—and their tactical skills—if ISIS membership becomes untenable.[36] Focusing on the defeat of individual groups—rather than the movement as a whole—is ineffective because Salafi-jihadi militants change their affiliations to adapt to local conditions and Western policy.

The US needs to broaden its understanding of counterterrorism. Libya's descent into civil war allowed the Salafi-jihadi base to escape the margins of society. Civil conflict in Libya supplies the freedom of movement and local support that Salafi-jihadi groups require to recruit and train militants, infiltrate local governance structures, seize cities, and plot attacks on the West. Resolving the Libyan civil war is essential to defeating this movement in Libya as part of its global defeat. Libya without civil conflict would have only a fraction of its current militancy problem—limited safe havens and access to trafficking in remote areas.

Yet Libya's Salafi-jihadi base has not infiltrated society on the level of Syria or Yemen. The international community still has time to inoculate Libyan society against whatever strain of Salafi-jihadism comes next. To do so, policymakers must grasp the reality of the situation. The Libyan civil war is the cause; ISIS and al Qaeda are the consequences.

Changing the Strategic Paradigm. Defeating the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base requires reconceptualizing the counterterrorism mission. The US and its allies need not address all the problems the Libyan people face. They must recognize, however, that good governance is critical for permanently defeating the Salafi-jihadi base.

The US must avoid several constraints and pitfalls that have hindered it in Libya and elsewhere:

- *Overemphasizing the Fight Against ISIS.* The US should focus on defeating the Salafi-jihadi movement, not a single group. Current US policy prioritizes the anti-ISIS fight over the fight against al Qaeda, to al Qaeda's benefit. If the US defeated both groups, another would emerge as long as the Salafi-jihadi base remained strong. Addressing the conditions that support the Salafi-jihadi movement will weaken both groups, prevent one from benefiting from the other's losses, and deny future groups the chance to establish themselves in Libya.

- *Relying on International Borders.* The US must reframe its approach to the theater to recognize that state borders do not define the battlefield. Neither enemy groups nor the human systems in which they operate observe state boundaries.[37] Weakening the Salafi-jihadi base in Libya will disrupt the larger African Salafi-jihadi network.

- *Working Exclusively by, with, and Through Recognized Central Governments.* The US must develop mechanisms to work at the substate level where problems are rooted. Working predominantly with the UN-backed unity government has placed the US at a disadvantage. Other actors—US allies and adversaries alike—maintain relationships with multiple substate factions. Appendix A discusses external actors' objectives and activities in detail.

- *Fear of Aiding Malign Actors.* Assistance for acceptable armed groups in a conflict environment will inevitably find its way to malign actors. The US can and should work to mitigate this phenomenon while recognizing that the damaging effects of marginally strengthening enemy groups can be vastly offset by the advantages of helping create and strengthen allies. Forgoing positive action for fear of the negative consequences keeps acceptable actors weak while allowing adversaries to strengthen and ultimately overtake those groups that the US seeks to empower.

- *Avoiding Risk.* The US must accept certain levels of risk to its personnel based on US national interests. Minimizing risk at all costs should not subsume all other US national interests. American diplomats need to operate in conflict zones where American interests are at stake, as US ambassadors have argued.[38]

The Current Situation

Libya is broken. It has three competing governments and a low-intensity civil war characterized by intermittent eruptions of violence and a complex factional landscape that defies easy distillation. Appendix A provides a detailed situation assessment.

Libya has never been a healthy state. Three historical regions compete for resources and power. Most Libyans live along the coast, but coastal powerbrokers who dominate national politics have limited reach into the country's vast interior. Qaddafi concentrated power in his inner circle but did not build a functioning bureaucracy during his four-decade rule.[39] He undercut traditional Libyan powerbrokers and played tribes and communities against each other to secure his regime, creating generational fissures in Libyan society that underpin the all-or-nothing competition characterizing the current conflict.

Qaddafi's fall in 2011 tore the lid off a fractious body politic. Long-repressed currents, among them eastern Libyan federalism and both peaceful and violent Islamism, rose to the surface. The anti-Qaddafi opposition never coalesced. Militias proliferated, filling the void left by the collapse of Qaddafi's security services and military. Weapons flooded the country. Regional states backed rival factions in a bid to shape the future of Libya. Several transitional governments failed, and the political crisis escalated to civil war by 2014. Al Qaeda and ISIS grew and strengthened in Libya during this period. Governance and security localized, with tribe and locality displacing the already weak national Libyan identity.[40]

A UN peace process sought to unify two warring governments but instead created a third power center in late 2015. The pace of the civil war slowed as rival

Table 1. Major Events in Libya, 2011–17

2011
February	Anti-Qaddafi protests begin. The National Transitional Council (NTC) forms.
October	Qaddafi is killed in Sirte.

2012
August	The NTC transfers power to the elected General National Congress (GNC).
September	Ansar al Sharia and affiliated militias attack the US consulate in Benghazi.

2013
May	The GNC passes the Political Isolation Law banning Qaddafi-era officials from holding positions in the transitional government.

2014
May	Gen. Haftar launches Operation Dignity against Islamist militias in Benghazi.
June	Libyans elect the House of Representatives (HoR) in a low-turnout election.
June–August	Islamist Libya Dawn militias drive the HoR from Tripoli. The HoR moves to Tobruk, and Islamist members of the former GNC reconvene in Tripoli.
November	ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi recognizes Libyan *wilayat*.

2015
June	ISIS takes control of Sirte.
December	Libyan delegates sign the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, establishing the Government of National Accord (GNA).

2016
March	The GNA arrives in Tripoli.
August	The US begins air strikes in support of GNA-aligned forces against ISIS.
September	The Libyan National Army (LNA) takes over the Libyan oil crescent.
December	A GNA-allied militia coalition liberates Sirte from ISIS with American support.

2017
July	The LNA declares victory over Islamist militants in Benghazi.
September	The UN Support Mission in Libya announces a new action plan for Libya.

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

militia coalitions settled into entrenched positions. Intermittent fighting for control of oil sites, military infrastructure, and population centers persists. Oil production increased significantly in 2016 and 2017 but remains unreliable.[41] Political polarization at the national level has worsened and leeched into local conflicts.[42] The UN reinvigorated the peace process in September 2017 in the hopes of ending the military conflict and political gridlock, but prospects for success of this reboot are dim if the US continues its current approach.[43]

Major structural problems are hampering conflict resolution and economic recovery in Libya. The country lacks a constitution or legal framework for elections.[44] The mandate of the UN-backed unity government expires in December 2017.[45] An economic crisis is draining the reserves of the formerly oil-rich country. A powerful black market and smuggling economy, extremely high subsidies, a large public sector, and disputes between key financial institutions have crippled the economy (see "The Economy" in Appendix A).

Figure 1. Fighting Forces Map
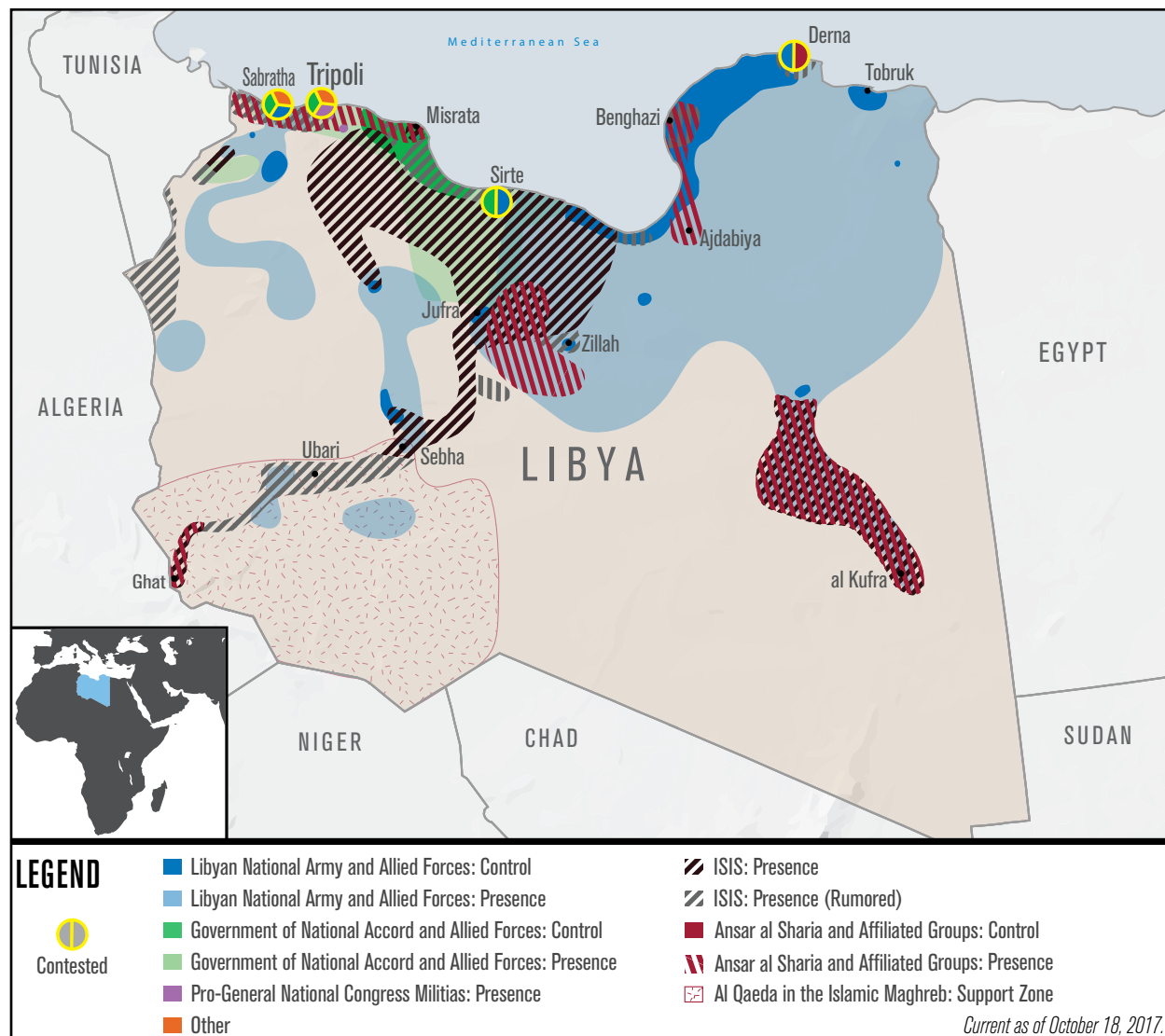
Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

Libya is at risk for a humanitarian crisis (see "Humanitarian Situation" in Appendix A). Social services have disintegrated. Its health system has collapsed.[46] Citizens face rolling blackouts from a crippled power grid. Food insecurity and water shortages are next. The situation is dire.

Overview of Actors. The Libya conflict breaks down into three main governing blocs, each loosely aligned with armed groups that wield the power on the ground (see Appendix A). Membership in these blocs is changeable, and each bloc has significant internal disagreement. The blocs draw support from different states (see Figure 1).

Internationally Recognized State Without an Army. The first bloc centers on the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), formed in late 2015. The GNA has executive branch officials and a consultative body but has not been approved by a legislature. It is weak and lacks a loyal ground force. The GNA instead relies on a loose coalition of Salafi militias and other armed

groups to nominally control Tripoli, Libya's capital. It also draws support from Misrata, a city-state in northwestern Libya with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist armed groups. Misratan forces, with US backing through the GNA, recaptured Sirte city from ISIS in late 2016. The GNA's external support comes from the US and European states, particularly Italy, as well as Tunisia.

Anti-Islamist Foreign-Backed Strongman. The second bloc revolves around the Libyan National Army (LNA), a loose militia coalition led by former Libyan Army General Khalifa Haftar. The LNA controls eastern Libya and key oil and military sites to the center and southwest. It rules the east in partnership with a rump executive branch and the House of Representatives legislature. LNA commander Haftar began a military campaign against Islamist and Salafi-jihadi groups in 2014 and now seeks national power. The LNA's main backers are Egypt and the UAE. It also draws support from Russia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and others. The LNA and GNA blocs are the primary participants in ongoing UN negotiations.

Islamist Militia Syndicate. The third and weakest bloc is a rump government backed by an Islamist militia syndicate. It is unlikely to reclaim power but is capable of degrading security and spoiling agreements in major Libyan cities, particularly Tripoli. This bloc comes from the General National Congress (GNC), a parliament elected in 2012 that held onto power by allying with Islamist militias that ousted its successor, the House of Representatives, from Tripoli in 2014. The GNC bloc fractured over the establishment of the UN-backed GNA in 2015. The anti-GNA faction tried and failed to overthrow the GNA in Tripoli but has since lost its foothold in the city. This pro-Islamist GNC bloc is aligned with hardline armed Islamist groups, including coalitions that include al Qaeda associate Ansar al Sharia. Qatar and Turkey back Islamist groups in both the pro-GNC and pro-GNA camps.

Several other actors wield influence on the fringe or outside the three main blocs. Libya's non-Arab minorities participate in the national conflict through loose alliances: the Tebu with the LNA, and the Amazigh and Tuareg with Misrata. Separately, the Qaddafi regime old guard is taking an increasingly visible role in the political conflict as an independent power center with some ties to a powerful Tripoli militia and Haftar's bloc.[47]

Figure 2 presents the key fronts in the current conflict.

The "Peace Process." The Libyan "peace process" consists of multiple competing and overlapping initiatives. The UN is leading the main process with an action plan announced in September 2017. Key Libyan actors who opposed the GNA are now participating in this process. Others are pursuing their interests through separate diplomatic channels. Russian- and French-led dialogues nominally support the UN process but effectively strengthen militarized factions. Egypt and the UAE run a parallel effort that supports Haftar. The Maghreb states and the African Union have also led talks seeking to resolve the conflict. Western powers have engaged separately to pursue counter-migration and counterterrorism objectives. Nearly all initiatives focus on resolving the coastal conflict but do not incorporate southern Libya. The Libyan people increasingly see the political track as ineffective.[48]

Critical issues for the future of the Libyan state remain unresolved. The country currently lacks grievance resolution and transitional justice processes at the local and national levels. Strong regional and local identities supersede Libyan national identity and impede dialogue. Lack of citizenship and representation worsens this trend for minority groups. Key powerbrokers are at an impasse on core issues, including the structure of Libya's military and security apparatus and its relationship to civilian governance. The question of Islam's role in the state is playing out in the ground battle between the staunchly anti-Islamist LNA and its rivals. The UN scored an initial victory by marshaling support for dialogue, but the thorniest discussions lie ahead.

Figure 2. Key Fronts in Libya: October 2017
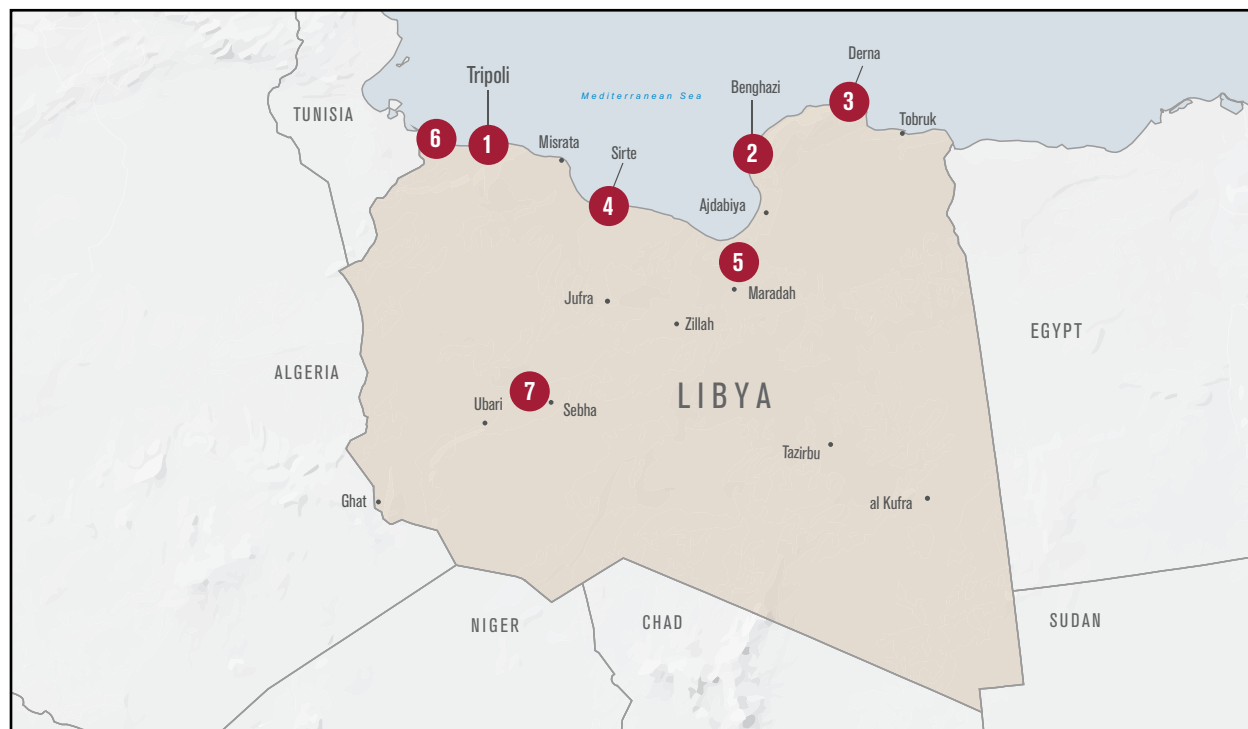
1. **Tripoli.** Shifting militia conglomerates compete for control of the capital and its environs. The GNA controls the capital through allied militias. These militias prioritize their interests over those of the GNA, however. Opposing militias allied with the rump GNC government can destabilize, but not control, the city.

2. **Benghazi.** The LNA controls the city. A damaging multiyear campaign weakened Salafi-jihadi groups and began a cycle of violence between residents of different regional backgrounds, economic classes, ideologies, and political affiliations. The city is vulnerable to low-level insurgency and assassination campaigns that could reignite conflict.

3. **Derna.** Derna is a historic hub for Salafi-jihadi activity. The LNA is attempting to seize the city from an Islamist militia coalition whose components include Ansar al Sharia. A drawn-out insurgency is likely.

4. **Sirte.** The LNA, Misratan forces, and Salafi militias jockey for control of post-ISIS Sirte, which lies on the seam between the main power centers in east and west. Sirte and Jufra districts in central Libya are staging grounds for militants that seek to contest population centers and oil infrastructure. ISIS is regrouping in this area.

5. **Oil.** The LNA controls the eastern oil crescent region but will face challenges from both rival militias and Salafi-jihadi groups. Militias in the west use control over pipelines, oil fields, and refineries to seek political change at the expense of Libya's economic recovery.

6. **Northwest Coast.** Factions that control human trafficking networks are fighting back against foreign-backed anti-trafficking groups. This conflict will erode local governance structures. The LNA and the GNA are also competing on this front.

7. **Southwest.** Coastal actors intermittently fight for control of military and resource sites in the Fezzan, which is not the focus of the Libyan political contest. Conflict between rival tribes in the Fezzan is locally rooted but can reverberate into the state-level conflict. Trafficking and smuggling routes run through this region.

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

A Call to Action

Now is the time to intervene in Libya. Current trends will lead to the continuation, and probably the growth, of threats to the US and its allies. The US has an opportunity to act before those threats are realized. Engaging now will yield the largest impact for a fraction of the price of a future intervention.

Libya is not on track for a durable resolution to the current conflict. A reduction in violence and the resumption of the UN-led peace process signal resolution in appearance only. The underlying conflicts that drive the Libyan civil war remain unresolved. Instability will ebb and flow with political violence on the local and national levels, preserving permissive conditions for Salafi-jihadi groups. No single actor is strong enough to secure the country outright, even with external backing,[49] and national elections in the near term will intensify current power struggles rather than resolve them.[50] Moves toward compromise reflect not resolution but adjustments to the growing power of the LNA,[51] which remains unlikely to deliver governance and stability even if it emerges victorious from the current conflict.

American leadership could have decisive effects at the current moment. The momentum behind the UN political process may wane as talks reach thorny issues in the absence of an incentive to compromise. The impending expiration of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement in December 2017 also opens the door to political competition and places negotiations at risk.

Continuing along the current path will make resolving the conflict more difficult. Local identities will become a defining feature, weakening the concept of Libyan national identity and further strengthening the cross-border human groupings that facilitate the illicit economy and weaken neighboring states. The humanitarian crisis will worsen and become a burden on the region and international community. ISIS, al Qaeda, and similar groups will develop more enduring havens that will support external attacks and absorb fighters from Iraq and Syria. Libya's Salafi-jihadi problem is not yet as dire as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan, but it is serious and worsening. US policymakers must redefine the problem—and then change the strategy—if the US is ever to extricate itself from an endless counterterrorism campaign.

A Strategy for Success in Libya

The United States cannot divorce the Libyan civil war and political conflict from the Salafi-jihadi phenomenon. Any strategy for Libya must therefore consider the interrelationship and connectivity of multiple contests and conflicts playing out inside the country. Appendix A addresses these contests in detail. The strategy must ensure that political, military, diplomatic, and other lines of effort are mutually reinforcing.

America's primary interest in Libya is weakening and ultimately defeating the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base in support of the movement's global defeat. Attacking al Qaeda and ISIS directly will not have the desired outcome and could harm other core US national security interests in the region. Appendix B provides a detailed analysis and assessment of the base's source of strength, its components, and how to attack them.

Weakening the Salafi-Jihadi Base

Weakening the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base requires severing its connection with the population. Conditions that degraded the population's inherent resistance to Salafi-jihadi groups made this connection possible. These conditions also make the core capabilities of groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda effective, including their military force and ability to deliver services (see "Critical Capabilities" in Appendix B).

The connection between the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base and the population rests on several requirements, which if eliminated would weaken or destroy the base. The requirements vulnerable to attack are the presence of popular grievances and civil conflict, security vacuums and governance gaps, and the base's access to resources. These vulnerabilities are interrelated.

Grievances and Conflict. Popular grievances and civil conflict mobilize communities. This mobilization empowers the Salafi-jihadi base as weak communities that reject its ideals tolerate Salafi-jihadi groups in exchange for security and governance. Resolving grievances and conflict reduces perceived existential threats to these communities and removes opportunities for Salafi-jihadi groups to secure acceptance.

Security Vacuums. Governance gaps and security vacuums create the vulnerable communities on which Salafi-jihadi groups prey. Security vacuums also allow Salafi-jihadi groups to conduct functions crucial to achieving their objectives, including training, coordination, and transit of fighters and leaders. Eliminating security vacuums in Libya would cut off the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base from populations and resources. It would also disrupt ISIS, al Qaeda, and related groups operating elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East, including attack networks that target Europe.

Resources. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base needs resources to carry out the military and governance campaigns through which it builds and maintains ties to populations and without which it would collapse. Cutting off access to resources requires addressing the conditions from which the base profits. These conditions include the growth of the illicit economy fueled by the nexus of robust smuggling and trafficking networks, state funding for Libyan militias, and the incentivizing of foreign and domestic donors to fund Libyan armed Islamist groups.

Recommended Strategy for Libya

The US must first define a desired end state in Libya before deriving strategic objectives.

Minimum Essential End-State in Libya. US national security requires that Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya do not threaten the American and European homelands or American persons in the region. The Salafi-jihadi base must be permanently isolated from the Libyan population and degraded such that it neither generates nor tolerates elements capable of attacking the West. Covert cells may remain, but they must be isolated and rendered incapable of conducting external attacks. Libyan security forces must be capable of limiting foreign fighter flows and denying transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations sanctuary in or freedom of movement through Libyan territory.

American interests require a stable Libya that does not generate violence or create conditions that foster militant activity, including civil conflict and popular grievances. Libya must not export instability to neighboring states or Europe in the form of refugee and migrant outflows, security threats, or economic disruption.

Libya must also not serve as a base for other enemies or adversaries of the US. It cannot host foreign military installations that challenge the freedom of movement of the US and its allies.

US Strategic Objectives. Establishing the minimum essential end-state requires the US to accomplish four strategic objectives in the long term.

1. Permanently destroy the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base in support of the global defeat of the Salafi-jihadi movement.

2. Establish governance that is legitimate and responsive to the population, permanent, sovereign, and acceptable to the US.

3. Establish security such that Libya does not destabilize other states and Libyan security forces are capable of defending its population, terrain, and sovereignty.

4. Prevent external actors from acting in Libya to undermine US interests or exacerbate regional or global disorder.

Strategic Key Tasks. The following tasks derive from the strategic objectives and are mutually reinforcing. The US and partner forces should execute them simultaneously to achieve the stated objectives.

1. Support a negotiated political settlement to produce an acceptable governance and security structure.

2. Identify, train, advise, and assist Libyan partner forces to destroy Salafi-jihadi threats and secure Libyan territory and communities.

3. Enable communities to isolate Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals.

4. Eliminate incentives for actors to continue the conflict.

5. Pressure regional states to cease military engagement and support an inclusive political settlement.

Required Conditions for Governance. Acceptable governance structures must meet several criteria. They must first be *legitimate* to the Libyan people. Popular acceptance must take priority over international recognition—a reversal of current US principle and practice. A government recognized by the international community but seen as illegitimate by Libyans cannot advance American security objectives over the long term.

Governance structures need to be *capable* of delivering basic services such as security and dispute resolution to maintain their popular legitimacy. Governance structures should also be *permanent* as defined by a constitution rather than a transitional agreement. Permanence is necessary to break a cycle

of continuous peace agreements that incentivize factions to compete militarily, prolonging and endlessly renewing armed conflict.

Governance must be *uncontested* such that components of the governance structure do not compete in a way that generates violence. The most likely solution is a unitary Libyan state with significant powers devolved to local and regional levels. Partition is a less viable option because of the geographic distribution of Libya's resources and population.[52] The state must be able to control and distribute Libya's economic resources in a way that does not generate civil conflict. The state must also wield sufficient force to compel compliance from armed groups throughout all Libya as defined by recognized borders. Civilian control over armed forces is required at the state and local levels. A state is unlikely to achieve a total monopoly on the use of force. Such a monopoly is not necessary for US interests as long as local security forces are responsive to legitimate local governance that is acceptable to the US and can execute required functions.

A governance structure should meet the Libyan population's needs without harming other US interests. Libyan governance and security structures must be hostile to Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals. They must be at least neutral if not friendly to the US.

Possible Approaches. The US can pursue its strategic objectives in many ways. The four most plausible are considered below.

Option #1: Limited Support for UN Initiative and Counter-ISIS Operations. This is the current US plan in Libya. It provides limited diplomatic support for the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the GNA. The US maintains and possibly expands sanctions on Libyan political leaders who obstruct the UN process[53] but takes no action to punish or constrain states that support Libyan proxies.[54] US forces sustain current intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) efforts to conduct targeted airstrikes against ISIS targets in isolated areas or direct-action operations.[55]

This plan requires limited upfront American investment, but repeated cycles of intervention will drive up the long-term cost. Sustaining a permanent ISR and direct-action capability in Libya will also prove expensive over the long term. The new UN action plan announced in September 2017 may achieve buy-in from key actors that previously opposed the GNA, but it probably will not resolve ground conflicts in an environment controlled by militias. A rush toward national elections will instead lead to another political crisis under current conditions.[56] The Salafi-jihadi base would retain its Libyan safe haven due to long-term instability.

Option #2A: Back Haftar. The US backs LNA commander and would-be strongman Khalifa Haftar to fight ISIS and stabilize Libya.[57] A small-scale US deployment trains, advises, and possibly assists LNA forces in counterterrorism operations. The US supports Haftar's inclusion in some UN-brokered governance structure and may endorse the lifting of the UN arms embargo for Haftar's forces.

This plan requires a limited increase in American military resources upfront and may stabilize part of Libya in the short term. However, the US would need to influence or abandon the UN process to secure Haftar's position. Haftar's inability[58] to secure and stabilize all of Libya due to his insufficient force strength and the fractiousness of his coalition will increase requirements for the US over time. Haftar's crackdown on nonviolent Islamism will also drive support to the Salafi-jihadi movement. A Haftar-led Libya may also increase Russian influence in North Africa.

Option #2B: Back Haftar Through the Russian Initiative. The US supports a Russian initiative to broker a diplomatic resolution to the Libya conflict that preserves the power of Russia's priority partner, LNA commander Haftar. Russia leverages its diplomatic, military, and economic ties to powerbrokers from multiple factions. (For a detailed assessment of Russia's operations in Libya, see "External Actors" in Appendix A.)

This option has minimal obvious cost to the US and could serve as a bargaining chip with the Russians for priority issues elsewhere. The Russian plan will strengthen military governance in eastern Libya

to secure Russian military influence—and possibly basing—on the central Mediterranean coast. Russia will subordinate counterterrorism operations to its military objectives, which exclude western and southern Libya. The Russian manipulation of rival factions also weakens the UN process and emboldens eastern Libyan federalists, making political resolution less likely.[59]

Option #3: US Invasion of Libya. American troops invade and occupy Libya to establish security, facilitate a political resolution, and defeat Salafi-jihadi groups. This approach frees the US from the constraints of working through partners. It also expedites a military campaign against Salafi-jihadi groups by delaying the requirement to train local forces. This approach has a high force requirement (likely in the tens of thousands of combat troops) and high cost in military resources. It will generate major backlash from Libyans and US allies and adversaries alike. A large US presence will rally unprecedented popular support to Salafi-jihadi groups, attract militants from outside Libya, and ultimately draw out the conflict.

Option #4: US Engages to Resolve the Civil War and Close Governance and Security Gaps. The US leads allies and partners in a holistic effort to resolve the Libyan civil war, end regional and global competition in Libya, and establish acceptable governance and security at the substate level. The US and allies work with willing and acceptable partners to eliminate the Salafi-jihadi safe haven in Libya and prevent its return. This plan manifests as pockets of stability in which the US and partners help Libyan communities achieve key governance and security gains. The knitting together of these pockets legitimizes a national governance structure and incentivizes communities to break relations with the Salafi-jihadi base. This approach is based on the assessment that a third party must guarantee the implementation of a power-sharing agreement for combatants to adhere to the terms.[60]

This approach requires the US to use soft power to resolve the Libyan civil war and close governance gaps at the local level. It also requires a limited deployment of American military forces to stabilize key areas and train and assist Libyan forces to secure their communities and fight Salafi-jihadi groups. The challenges of this strategy include rallying external actors behind a unified plan and addressing the structural problems that underpin the political and economic crisis. Successful engagement will resolve the political crisis while closing the security and governance gaps that enable militancy at the local level.

Recommended Strategy: Lines of Effort. A strategy focused on closing governance and security gaps (Option #4) is most likely to succeed because it addresses the conditions that underpin both the Salafi-jihadi movement and regional instability. This recommended strategy is a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach. It seeks to create stable governance pockets that can be linked to national structure and ultimately integrated to establish governance and security across Libya.

The campaign can be broken down into four mutually reinforcing lines of effort that each serve one or more of the key tasks.

- *Political.* The US with allies and partners conducts simultaneous top-down and bottom-up diplomatic engagement to resolve the Libyan political crisis.

- *Substate.* The US, allies, and partners deliver critical services through Libyan structures to close governance gaps and prevent a humanitarian crisis.

- *Security.* US and allied forces train, advise, and assist Libyan security forces to secure the population and defeat Salafi-jihadi groups.

- *Environment.* The US and allies apply diplomatic, military, and economic levers to eliminate incentives for various actors to prolong the conflict in Libya.

The lines of effort are synergistic and therefore not prioritized.

Political Engagement to Resolve the Civil War. American diplomatic efforts support a negotiated political settlement that ends the elite conflict, empowers local authorities, and effectively links the levels of government.

The US reestablishes a diplomatic presence inside Libya to build the relationships and glean the intelligence required to support the other parts of this strategy. This posture shift demonstrates to Libyans and the international community that the US is committed to an inclusive political solution that goes beyond countering ISIS. The return of American leadership will begin to reshape the calculus of the actors involved.

American engagement includes working with European and regional partners to reshape their objectives in Libya into a cohesive framework congruent with American interests, unifying international efforts in Libya. The US plays a coordinating role with European states, which generally have shared objectives but at times pursue divergent lines of effort. Regional allies—especially Egypt and the UAE—will require more pressure to constrain their actions in Libya.

This approach requires an American diplomatic presence on the ground in Libya. The Libyan security environment is permissive compared with other conflict zones. There are obvious security requirements but no insurmountable barriers to expeditionary diplomacy.

The envisioned US diplomatic engagement prioritizes inclusivity among Libyan stakeholders. American diplomats enter multiple locations as quickly as possible to reduce the perception of choosing a side. They prioritize entering Tripoli, Libya's capital, over Benghazi, Haftar's base, but both are necessary. American diplomats engage with powerbrokers across the board to identify sources of conflict and facilitate negotiations. These powerbrokers include the GNA and those who have not accepted the GNA but are not actively fighting against it. The US does not recognize a sovereign Libyan government until there is a structure capable of providing legitimate and responsive governance within Libya's borders.

The US supports UN leadership in the Libyan peace process but is prepared to convene talks if necessary. The intent of the process is to generate a state governance structure that breaks the cycle of ephemeral peace agreements. The UNSMIL action plan announced in September 2017 is useful if it delivers on the promised Libyan-led, inclusive process. US engagement puts power behind this framework in order to garner buy-in from actors that benefit from the status quo. The US cannot be wedded to the current framework, although it should avoid renegotiating agreements whenever possible. Success may require willingness to change or adapt the negotiating framework to ensure Libyan buy-in and avoid imposing an external structure.

Libyans must lead the constitutional drafting and approval process. The US pushes for conditions necessary to meet governance and security objectives. These conditions include civilian control over the military and the inclusion of previously disenfranchised groups, whose integration into an effective governance structure is particularly critical for securing southern Libya. This approach integrates the elite-level peace process with local and regional agreements, which aim to avoid gridlock caused by power sharing at the national level. Such agreements are an opportunity to deescalate violence locally and draw actors toward a national settlement. Local engagement by a national entity has resolved conflicts in Libya in the past.[61]

National elections are only beneficial when conditions are set for all stakeholders to participate and accept the outcome. Elections should not occur without a legal framework or in a security environment in which armed actors can impose their will on civilian governance structures and populations.[62] A preliminary elite-level agreement may be necessary to avoid a breakdown in the status quo before elections can take place. Local elections should be held before national elections in order to strengthen local governance before a national contest.

The US leverages unilateral tools and partnerships with Libyan institutions to provide economic incentives to encourage commitment to a peace deal. Incentives include lifting sanctions, unfreezing assets, and providing capacity-building programs. Libyan institutions also require external support to

end salary payments to militias that obstruct peace agreements or their implementation.

The US assists Libyan institutions in implementing policy changes that address the structural challenges that encumber Libya's economic recovery. The most pressing requirements are subsidy reform and the devaluation of the Libyan dinar. They will be politically unpopular in the near term and must be sequenced carefully with tangible benefits to the population, including increased liquidity and the return of public services. The US also has the ability[63] to mediate between the Central Bank of Libya and executive branch officials to securely disburse funds in support of governance objectives. It should consider promising models from other theaters to develop a financial system for Libya that will allow legitimate actors to access state revenues while mitigating corruption.[64] Libya also requires support for the legal and regulatory reforms necessary to invite more foreign investment as the security environment improves.

This line of effort also includes setting conditions for healing societal rifts to prevent renewed conflict in the long term. The US can encourage the formation and development of civil society to facilitate grievance resolution and development of Libyan identity. This effort includes vetting and training civil society organizations and supporting their return from exile. Repairing Libya's social fabric also requires preparing for a formal grievance resolution process. Libyans must lead this effort, but the US can support it by opposing broad political isolation laws and building judiciary capacity.

Close Governance Gaps at the Substate Level. The US spearheads an international effort to deliver critical services to the Libyan people to strengthen governance structures and prevent a humanitarian crisis.

The US and partners seek out acceptable groups and individuals who are or could become locally or nationally legitimate. It assists them in establishing or strengthening their legitimacy, which includes capacity to provide services and sufficient strength to retain their position. Potential intermediaries include municipal officials, business leaders, tribes, civil society, and religious leaders. US diplomatic, military, and

clandestine personnel forge direct relationships to inform these decisions.

Locally legitimate structures, including municipal councils[65] and mayors, are the best candidates for strengthening governance at the community level. The US and partners assist with municipal elections and concurrent service delivery in 2018 to avoid legitimacy crises at the local level and increase public trust in local democratic institutions. This effort requires a national political framework that devolves additional funding and responsibilities to municipalities.[66] Municipalities require assistance with budget execution and, where possible, introducing limited taxation. Delivering benefits to local populations in this way aims to weaken nonstate armed actors relative to civilian governance structures over time.

The success of local governance relies on the movement of money. The US and partners assist with public financial management and the development and execution of a national budget to provide sufficient funds for local governance structures to function.[67] The effort aims to knit together levels of government and increase public trust in local and national institutions. It requires parallel security improvements to encourage people to circulate money in the licit economy.

Dealing with local governance structures presents several challenges that require mitigation. The US engages with Haftar and LNA leadership to access communities in the increasingly militarized eastern Libya, with access to economic programs and international aid as incentives. The US and partners work with local councils that are complicit in illicit economic activity to shape their actions and support the delivery of licit benefits to constituencies. The US must take care to avoid empowering Salafi-jihadi actors, which have penetrated local governance structures in a few cases.[68]

Success depends on delivering near-term benefits to the Libyan people such that they buy into a peace agreement. The US and partners support revenue sharing and reconstruction initiatives to bring oil export benefits to the population. Revenue sharing is necessary to disincentivize the intermittent blockades that disrupt Libya's oil production. It will also

build a social contract between populations and governance structures, as well as mitigate political polarization rooted in the uneven distribution of resources. Reestablishing the social contract in southern Libya is also necessary to build relationships between governance structures and local forces that will play a role in border security.

The impending humanitarian crisis in Libya is both a dire threat and an opportunity to strengthen local governance by meeting popular needs. The US spearheads and marshals support for a humanitarian effort. This effort runs through legitimate Libyan governing structures to avoid creating dependence on international nongovernmental organizations. The priority efforts are closing critical gaps in the health care system and its supply chains, improving the electrical grid, and preventing the mass shortages of food and potable water. Opportunities to build goodwill and reduce conflict in the near term are aiding and resettling Libyan internally displaced persons (IDPs) and demining former conflict zones.

Secure the Population. The US conducts a train, advise, and assist mission to build Libyan security forces capable of securing their communities and defending them against Salafi-jihadi groups.

The initial phase requires a political agreement that includes a security framework. Armed forces must be responsive to either local or national civilian leadership. The political agreement is also necessary to reduce polarization that could prevent US personnel and programming from reaching rival constituencies. This phase requires US personnel to gain and maintain visibility on local conditions and their evolution as part of the diplomatic effort that supports the political agreement.

US forces train and advise acceptable substate Libyan forces drawn from a wide range of political and tribal constituencies. Acceptable forces do not tolerate or support Salafi-jihadi groups or individuals and must be willing to participate in a shared end-state with rival factions. Previous commitment to the GNA is not required, but acceptable groups must not actively fight against the GNA or central governance structures formed in the political agreement.

The intent of the mission is to build professional organizations that protect legitimate governance structures and safeguard the welfare of Libya's citizens. Training occurs inside Libya if possible to help these forces retain legitimacy. Training likely requires dual tracks for local and national forces. Local forces should be deterred from mobilizing outside their communities. Nonprofessional forces are incorporated into a structure that preserves local command and sets conditions for their future demobilization. Training for the Libyan Armed Forces draws units from different geographic areas to increase identification with the Libyan state over local communities.

US forces assist Libyan security forces in fighting Salafi-jihadi groups. They also help Libyan forces in disrupting internal and cross-border flows of resources to these groups. The US and partners pair military operations with governance, development, and aid initiatives. These initiatives reach a diverse set of communities simultaneously in order to avoid generating competition.

Communities and groups must permanently expel and cease cooperation with Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals to receive international assistance. Most Libyan communities already meet this standard.[69] Enforcing it requires developing criteria for defining Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals. These criteria must account for the use of "terrorist"[70] designations to slander political rivals and delegitimize political Islamists in the Libyan political environment.

The US security mission includes protecting the Libyan communities and partner forces that risk retaliation by ousting Salafi-jihadi groups, which have asymmetric capabilities with which to punish communities. Demonstrating this commitment is necessary to incentivize communities to permanently isolate the Salafi-jihadi movement. (For an assessment of Salafi-jihadi military capabilities in Libya, see Appendix B.)

The recommended approach prioritizes security and governance objectives while mitigating any imminent threat from the Salafi-jihadi base. The security mission is paramount for achieving the ultimate defeat of this base.

Change the Environmental Incentive Structures. The US strategy combines political, security, and economic efforts to transform the economic conditions and regional dynamics that favor continued conflict in Libya.

The US and its partners work to change the dynamics of the conflict such that they no longer favor Haftar's military expansion. American diplomats open dialogue with Haftar to identify the carrots and sticks that can shape his behavior. Military training is a possible incentive, and sanctions are a possible disincentive. Engagement with Haftar must coincide with strengthened relationships with acceptable Haftar opponents in order to prevent retaliatory mobilization and discourage cooperation with or tolerance for Salafi-jihadi groups.

Regional diplomacy is required. The US negotiates with external actors to reduce or end support for competing Libyan factions. Egyptian and Emirati military support, as well as Russian military and financial support, are the most problematic.[71] American military assets deployed in support of its security objectives in Libya should be calibrated to deter Russian military expansion into the central Mediterranean. The US administration considers strengthening and enforcing the UN arms embargo to deter foreign military support for Libyan factions.

A regional effort is necessary to degrade the illicit economy to change the incentive structure that encourages some stakeholders to continue the conflict. The US should spearhead this effort, which also seeks to prevent Libyan and transnational Salafi-jihadi groups from sustaining themselves via illicit flows. The US sustains ISR to identify key nodes in the human trafficking network. It employs kingpin designations, arrests, and direct-action operations to neutralize these nodes and deter participation in the illicit economy. This approach is not intended to destroy the smuggling economy, which would remove livelihoods and generate popular opposition and militancy. It is calibrated to weaken the parts of the illicit economy that drive the Libya conflict and support Salafi-jihadi groups.

Degrading the illicit economy includes countering human trafficking. The US and international community engage with the migrant crisis in Libya in a way that does not strengthen militias over civilian institutions. Counter-migration efforts must be administered through local governance structures such that they do not incite violence between competing militias or exacerbate state-level power struggles. The US works with European allies, who could take the lead, to end policies that empower militias.[72] The US also supports changes to Libyan law to reduce militias' leverage over migrants.[73] Programming to support migrants' human rights is paired with initiatives in Libyan communities to avoid worsening hostility toward the migrant community. This effort is focused on isolating the migrant crisis as a driver of instability in Libya and must be paired with strategies to address the causes of migration, which are discussed in the "Supporting Efforts" section.

Sequencing and Phasing

The lines of effort are synergistic. One cannot proceed or succeed without the others. The US and its partners must pay close attention to the political climate and to messaging operations such that steps taken on the ground to establish security and close governance gaps reinforce, rather than undermine, the high-level diplomatic effort.

This recommended approach provides an estimated timeline for implementation, but deadlines must not drive policy. Objectives and appropriate phasing must inform the timeline.

Desynchronization can cause failure at several critical junctures in the proposed strategy. The US must meet an initial intelligence requirement to engage at the substate level in a way that does not worsen local conflicts or rouse a strong anti-American response. The strategy also requires navigating the complexities of required reforms and their likely political costs. Long-term economic gain is impossible without major structural changes such as subsidy reform. Careful sequencing and expectation management are critical for such reforms to avoid generating popular backlash against the governance structures that the strategy seeks to strengthen. Countering the illicit economy

must also be timed carefully with governance, security, and economic advances to reduce the negative impact on communities that rely on the illicit economy for their livelihoods. Finally, legal framework gaps and legitimacy vacuums must be anticipated. Support should be provided rapidly for municipal elections to avoid local political crises.[74]

Interim Objectives

The US should pursue its long-term strategic objectives in Libya, but achieving the following midterm objectives within three to five years would indicate the US is on the path toward success:

1. Degrade Salafi-jihadi groups inside Libya and deny transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations access to Libyan terrain and human networks. Isolate the Salafi-jihadi movement from the Libyan population.

2. Establish and strengthen governance structures at the local and national levels that meet stated requirements.

3. Train Libyan security forces capable of providing security and defending communities at the local level.

4. Reduce conflict, instability, and criminal activity to increase buy-in to a political resolution and limit the negative effects on other states.

5. Pressure external actors to cease military support that emboldens spoilers in Libya.

Achieving the following near-term objectives in the first year would signal that the US has the initiative:

1. Establish American commitment to the resolution of the Libya crisis. Demonstrate commitment by reestablishing a US diplomatic presence in Libya. Convene European and regional allies and partners to develop a unified plan.

2. Use leverage over Egypt, the UAE, and other external actors to enforce observance of international agreements, including the UN arms embargo.

3. Develop relationships with substate actors to begin closing governance gaps. Initiate or support programming to bring near-term benefits to the Libyan people, including health care, IDP housing, and banking services. Begin vetting and training security forces to increase professionalism and set conditions for future policing and counterterrorism operations. Facilitate municipal elections to prevent governance and legitimacy gaps.

Enemy Responses

Salafi-jihadi actors will attack US personnel in Libya. US personnel will be most vulnerable to green-on-blue attacks (attacks by Libyan security forces personnel on US service members), which may not be limited to Salafi-jihadi militants. The US mitigates this threat by vetting individual fighters, not just unit commanders, and by adopting tactical practices and procedures developed in Afghanistan to counter a similar threat. The US also establishes trust relationships—through security and diplomatic efforts—with local communities to gain awareness of attempts to infiltration local units receiving training.

Salafi-jihadi groups will seek to counter US initiatives by attacking American efforts indirectly. Assassination campaigns targeting local US partners and bombing campaigns intended to erode local security to turn populations against new governance and security structures are likely. Salafi-jihadi groups may also withdraw rapidly and cease defending populations, leaving them vulnerable to revenge attacks that will deepen local grievances and preserve reliance on Salafi-jihadi groups. The US must be prepared to provide security for its partners and to defend certain local populations.

Non-Salafi-jihadi armed groups may also attack partnered forces and US personnel in Libya. The

recommended plan mitigates this risk by constraining militias' access to state and illicit resources and by providing incentives for participation.

Russia will conduct a disinformation and possibly a hybrid warfare campaign against US action in Libya in line with its current counter-US actions. Russian narratives will include blaming the US and NATO for the Libya crisis.[75] Russia may justify its support for Haftar as a counterterrorism partnership, echoing its line in Syria.[76] Its response to constraints on Haftar may accuse the US and partners of supporting al Qaeda, drawing on anti-Islamist rhetoric, or accuse the US of operating in Africa in order to steal resources. Russia may justify its own military basing in Libya as a response to the US military footprint in Africa. Russia may also respond in a different theater and could pressure European states, most likely Italy, to undermine US initiatives.

Supporting Efforts

The US and partners conduct information operations to support other lines of effort. Messaging must manage the population's expectations and build trust. Unrealistic expectations for rapid service delivery and economic improvements have undermined governance structures in the past.[77] The US also needs to counter Russian disinformation and hybrid warfare in Libya and internationally.

The migrant crisis requires the US and European and African states to develop a unified strategy to manage its causes and symptoms. Others have proposed policies to better manage migrant flows to Europe and address the drivers of economic migration from Sub-Saharan Africa.[78] The US pursues policies that reduce migrant inflows to Libya in the near term without strengthening the nonstate actors that currently benefit from trafficking. Possible solutions include an education and repatriation program to change the expectations of communities from which economic migrants originate.

The US limits the effect of other regional and global conflicts on the Libyan theater. This effort includes ongoing US efforts to resolve the Gulf diplomatic crisis or shield Libya from its effects. It requires increased US attention to countering Russian aggression in the Mediterranean and Europe.

The US sustains its current partnerships with Libya's neighbors. US military and security support for Tunisia has weakened cross-border Salafi-jihadi networks between Tunisia and Libya.[79] US security relationships with Egypt,[80] Chad,[81] and Niger[82] are also crucial for countering militancy throughout the region. Sustained US support for French and Nigerien operations in the Sahel keeps pressure on the al Qaeda network that reaches into southern Libya. These partnerships also provide leverage with Libya's neighbors that can help shape their behavior along the lines indicated above.

Assumptions

The proposed plan will be invalidated if any of the underlying key assumptions, listed below, prove false:

- **No Significant Change in Russian Engagement.** Russia sustains approximately its current level of effort in Libya and does not significantly increase its involvement in Libya in response to increased US action. In particular, Russia does not deploy advanced anti-access/aerial denial (A2AD) capabilities to Libya.

- **No Major Regional Security Crises.** Other Northern African states do not experience major domestic turmoil, regime change, or state collapse that severely changes the situation in Libya. In particular, the collapse of Egypt or Algeria would greatly affect Libya and draw international and regional resources away from the Libya conflict. Similar events in Tunisia or the Sahelien states are less likely to derail the Libya strategy but would require branch plans for dealing with refugees and other spillover effects.

- **Presence of Willing and Able State and Substate Partners.** US allies and partners in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East accept and

cooperate with the course of action. The strategy accounts for—and expects—resistance from regional states whose actions in Libya run counter to US interests, but it assumes that the US has sufficient tools to shape the actions of these states. The strategy also requires the US and Europe to agree on a common mission for Libya.

- **No Significant Change in the Nature of the Libyan War.** The Libya conflict remains a predominantly domestic issue with external actors attempting to influence it. The evolution of the Libya crisis into a geostrategic problem like Syria would place different requirements on the US.

Forces Required

This report does not seek to do the work of professional planning staffs to determine the number of US military and diplomatic personnel required to achieve the stated objectives. The recommended strategy requires a fully staffed diplomatic mission with security capabilities. It also requires a larger military footprint with a likely emphasis on Special Operations Forces. The intent is to deploy US forces at the lowest levels required to achieve the mission and to remain below the level that would cause backlash. The force requirement also depends on the commitments of US allies and partners.

Libya's relatively permissive environment lessens the force requirement, despite the country's large size. Access to the Mediterranean, as well as basing in Europe, Niger, and possibly Tunisia, reduce the requirement for a large support presence in Libya. The security requirements for diplomatic personnel will vary by community.

The Approach: Partners, Adversaries, Challenges, and Risks

This approach is part of a strategic reset required to secure US interests in Africa and the Middle East. It supports a primary strategic objective for US Africa Command (AFRICOM) to develop the capabilities of African partners to contribute to regional stability and security. It does so by shaping the outcome of the Libyan conflict toward a durable resolution and by enabling Libyan forces to provide for their own security in the long term. This approach is also intended to reassert American leadership on the global stage and set a precedent for success that will benefit American initiatives in other theaters.

Partners and Adversaries

The US does not need to act unilaterally or bear the full cost of solving Libya's problems. The approach requires the US to create a strategic framework within which it will lead and shape existing allies and partners. It should find willing partners in the UN, Europe, the African Union, and the Arab League and among Libya's neighbors that share the goal of countering instability, militancy, and migration from Libya. US reengagement in Libya is a golden opportunity to better integrate its policy with European and African allies, especially as France and Germany increase their investment in the Sahel.[83] The approach recognizes that outsourcing the protection of US interests in Libya to others—the UN, EU, Arab states, or Russia—preserves the status quo and perpetuates instability.

The approach requires the US to engage with states whose interests and objectives place them in a grey zone between ally and adversary in the Libyan theater. Many of these states are allied or partnered with the US elsewhere. The US should apply pressure to shape the behavior of Middle Eastern and North African states that back armed factions in Libya while balancing against other aspects of these relationships. Shaping Egyptian actions will be the most difficult because of the level of Egyptian involvement and the real and perceived threats Cairo faces from Libya.

The US must treat Russia as an adversary in Libya.[84] However, doing so does not inevitably lead to direct conflict with Russia. Russian investment in Libya is limited. The US must balance its priorities vis-à-vis Russia in Libya in the context of Russian actions worldwide while recognizing the potential for Russia to spoil US initiatives in Libya.

Risks and Challenges

Ensuring success with the recommended approach requires mitigating predictable risks and challenges. Some risks require branch plans or additional policy decisions.

The return of American leadership to Libya raises several policy decision points. The US must calibrate its role to convene and lead partners to mitigate the risk that European states will reduce engagement in Libya in response to the American entry. However, this risk is limited given the importance of the Libyan crisis to Europe. American engagement in Libya also requires a review of existing US policies that impact the Libyan theater. The recommended approach

requires building goodwill with the Libyan people. Travel and visa restrictions on Libyan citizens traveling to the US are therefore harmful, so the US could prioritize developing robust screening capacity at the point of origin to balance risk while improving relations with Libyans.[85]

This approach requires US and European policy decisions on the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. US naval vessels supporting personnel in Libya will come into contact with migrant vessels in distress. The US needs a policy to handle interactions with migrants in a way that observes humanitarian law while managing relationships with Europe.

A policy for Libya must also account for potential second- and third-order effects in other theaters. Managing the migration route through Libya may decrease migrant departures if paired with appropriate programming in migrants' countries of origin. Migrant routes may shift in response, putting pressure on other Maghreb states or creating a new humanitarian situation. Stabilizing Libya may also cause Salafi-jihadi groups to relocate to neighboring regions, including the Sahel and Sudan.

This approach may generate unintended consequences in Libya if not properly executed. Regional states operating in Libya intentionally conflate political Islamists and Salafi-jihadists to serve their own political agendas. The US must not accept or perpetuate this conflation. Political reconciliation in Libya requires Islamist participation. It also requires Islamist militias that fight alongside Salafi-jihadi groups against common adversaries to sever ties with Salafi-jihadi groups and accept the new political system. The US cannot afford to make enemies[86] of non-jihadist Islamist actors in Libya. The US mitigates this challenge by developing sufficient intelligence to vet individuals and groups without completely relying on regional partners. Strengthening governance structures, as emphasized in the recommended approach, will constrain non-jihadist Islamist groups with anti-democratic tendencies. These groups are unpopular with the electorate in nonconflict circumstances.

Libyans must accept the presence of American forces for this approach to succeed. Libyans have already accepted the limited presence of US special operators and demonstrated willingness to participate in US-funded programs,[87] but the line between acceptance and resistance may be fine. The overmilitarization of the American presence in Libya—or a mistake by American personnel that causes grievances—raises the risk of backlash against the American presence. Alternately, the presence of American programs raises the risk that militias might proliferate as groups position for access to training or disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) benefits. A robust information operation campaign to educate Libyans on the DDR process and manage expectations of those involved in the conflict could mitigate this risk.[88]

Costs of Success and Failure

Success in Libya is valuable and cost-effective. The approach requires a smart—not large—American investment that will pay dividends in its effect on the global Salafi-jihadi movement and regional stability. It is a valuable supporting effort to the priority US counterterrorism initiative in Iraq and Syria. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate American leadership and commitment that will have positive ripple effects for American diplomatic initiatives throughout the region. The long-term benefits of ending the Libya crisis include a stable North Africa that advances American national security and provides opportunities for American businesses.

Both failure and inaction in Libya have a high future cost. Persistent instability will lead to another unending US counterterrorism mission to hold back the tide of militancy. The security vacuum and governance gaps in Libya will impede stability and economic growth throughout the region and foster an increasingly intractable base for the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

The US must seize its opportunity in Libya and look to the benefits—not just the necessity—of a smart engagement now.

Conclusion

Now is the time to act in Libya. The US has an opportunity to reset a narrative of failure in the Arab world by solving a solvable problem. Success in Libya will have positive effects on the security of three continents. It will be a first—and major—step in rebuilding the confidence of allies, adversaries, and the American public in the leadership and capabilities of the United States.

The US must prevent Libya from becoming more like Syria—an entrenched regional conflict with a massive human cost that provides enduring safe haven to Salafi-jihadi groups. This report proposes an initial concept for pursuing US interests in Libya: defeating the Salafi-jihadi threat from Libya and stabilizing the country so that it does not produce humanitarian crises or regional instability.

The proposed strategy rests on the assessment that Salafi-jihadi groups cannot be defeated militarily. It therefore calls for a paradigm shift in US counterterrorism policy that subordinates military action to securing the population and enabling legitimate and responsive governance. Such governance is required to permanently change the conditions that favor the Salafi-jihadi movement in Libya and globally. Defeating the Salafi-jihadi threat in Libya, therefore, requires resolving the civil war and closing governance and security gaps at the substate level.

Achieving these objectives requires American leadership and engagement. This engagement carries risks for American personnel. The US can ill afford to allow tragedies such as the 2012 Benghazi attack to deter it from pursing core interests. US ambassadors have argued for a return to expeditionary diplomacy.[89] Robust diplomacy is required to forge the relationships required to end the conflict in Libya.

Successful policy requires commitment. This does not mean large expenditures of financial or military resources. It means a willingness to stay the course beyond one political cycle to see through a strategy and reap the benefits of victory. Libya has the potential to overcome its present challenges and become an economic, strategic, and diplomatic partner to the US.

The US must not let short-termism undermine its interests in Libya. Libya's democratic transition failed in part due to insufficient follow-through after the 2011 NATO intervention. The American focus on achieving the rapid military defeat of ISIS has similarly undercut the overarching requirement to resolve the political and security crisis and weaken the Salafi-jihadi base. Other short-term solutions—such as backing a would-be strongman to defeat ISIS and stabilize the country—will fail.

The recommended strategy calls for a heavy diplomatic effort paired with limited military engagement. This recommendation is intended as a framework for professional planning staffs. It is also an appeal for the US to not retreat from Libya—or the world. Libya is a complex problem but not a lost cause. It is a chance to right past wrongs, serve the legacies of those who gave their lives, and demonstrate that peace is possible.

Notes

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7. The Salafi-jihadi movement is an ideological movement that holds that it is a religious obligation for individual Muslims to use armed force to cause the establishment of a true Muslim state governed under a Salafi interpretation of *shari'a*. See Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy*.

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10. Libya's small population, high standard of living, and hydrocarbon economy made it a primary destination for Tunisian and Egyptian workers. The Libyan civil wars and accompanying economic crisis removed this source of livelihood, sending tens of thousands of unemployed workers back to states already struggling with anemic economies. Tunisian and Egyptian security forces closed border crossings intermittently due to Salafi-jihadi cross-border activity, disrupting regular movement of trade goods. These closures disrupted fragile economic ecosystems in regions already prone to unrest. See UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, "Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the Tunisian Economy: An Estimation of the Macroeconomic and Fiscal Impacts of the Libyan Crisis

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63. The US has supported Central Bank of Libya Governor Sadiq al Kebir when European states have opposed his continued leadership, giving the US leverage over Kebir. AEI's Critical Threats Project working group on Libya, September 19, 2017.

64. The US should draw on successful counter-corruption models from its experience in other theaters, such as Afghanistan and Somalia. Support for transparent budget development and execution would be beneficial. Third-party validation for the disbursement of state funds may help break the deadlock between the Central Bank and executive officials. Mobile banking may also provide opportunities to mitigate the liquidity crisis, although there are infrastructure hurdles. See NATO, "Building Integrity and Reducing Corruption in Defence: A Compendium of Best Practices," vol 2., December 9, 2016, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_12/20161209_1612-Anti-corruption-Effort-Afghanistan.pdf; World Bank, "Afghanistan Takes a Digital Leap to Tackle Corruption," March 12, 2017, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/03/12/afghanistan-takes-a-digital-leap-tackle-corruption; Maira Martini, "Anti-Corruption Helpdesk," Transparency International, March 30, 2014, https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/answer/transparency_in_budget_execution; and AEI's Critical Threats Project working group on Libya, September 19, 2017.

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Appendix A. Situation Assessment

The Libyan Theater

The situation in Libya is complex. The current conflict reflects not only historical trends and the legacies of Qaddafi's rule, but also emergent domestic and regional dynamics.

Physical and Human Geography. Libyan society is complex, but the basic characteristics of its geography and demography are simpler than other theaters in which the US has operated. Libya's population—and its political contests—are concentrated on the Mediterranean coast. Nearly a third of the country's approximately six million people live in Tripoli and Benghazi.[1] However, southern Libya is important terrain despite its sparse population. Long-established smuggling and trafficking routes crisscross the Libyan desert to move people and goods, including weapons and drugs, to the Libyan coast and onward to Europe and the Middle East. Libya is the "backdoor to Europe"—a terminus for many of Africa's major migrant flows.[2]

Libya is comprised of three regions that belonged to different historical human systems: Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan. Power struggles among these regions are among the factors that shape the current conflict. Cyrenaica in eastern Libya was historically in the Egyptian sphere of influence.[3] It has a strong tribal identity and has historically sought autonomy from the more populous and cosmopolitan Tripolitania, in the northwest. Tripolitania's tribes are more fragmented, making the region difficult to unify despite a historical notion of a Tripolitanian kingdom or republic.[4] Fezzan in southwestern Libya has historical ties to the Sahel region rather than Libya's Mediterranean coast. It is sparsely populated and remains tribal and nomadic or seminomadic. Littoral powerbrokers from both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica have sought to impose their will on Fezzan and exploit its resources.

Libyan identity is multifaceted, and national identity is weak. Tribes extend across state borders, creating human terrain systems independent of national identity. Regional identity plays a significant but not overriding role in Libyan society. The unequal distribution of natural resources is a motivating factor for the regions to remain unified, as is the historical crossover between eastern and western populations.[5] Tribal, local, and ethnic rivalries predominate over very limited sectarian and confessional divides.[6] Most Libyans are of Arab or combined Arab-Amazigh (Berber) heritage. The native Amazigh population, which includes an Ibadi Muslim minority, faces ethnic and religious discrimination.[7] Non-Arab ethnic groups are historically disenfranchised. The youth population is large, and there are strong generational divides over the 2011 revolution and the future of the Libyan state.[8]

Several historical governance trends have persisted throughout Libya's history. Governance is strongest in littoral population centers and weaker in the inland periphery. City-states are a strong source of identity reinforced by historical and recent instances of collective urban defense.[9] Political leaders have historically used notables, including tribal and religious leaders, to extend their power.[10] Rulers have also tended to favor their region or tribe.

Qaddafi's Impact on Libyan Society. Colonel Muammar al Qaddafi ruled Libya for four decades. He attempted to implement an ambitious social, political, and economic revolution under his complete control while managing Libya's increasing interaction with the international community. The ripples of Qaddafi's manipulation underpin several dynamics of the current conflict and the challenges of its resolution.

Qaddafi seized power from a weak Libyan monarchy in a military coup in 1969. He lacked the backing of a significant political constituency and instead set about fragmenting Libyan society to create a stabilized chaos that he could control. He played factions

against each other, redistricted across tribal lines, and alternately co-opted and marginalized tribes, weakening traditional powerbrokers while elevating minor factions, making them dependent on his state.[11] Qaddafi saw the tribes' capacity for political and military mobilization as the greatest threat to his power. Qaddafi also sought to neuter religious authorities, including those that underpinned the prior monarchy, by establishing his own religious credentials and indoctrinating the population in his own political-religious-economic program.[12]

Qaddafi concentrated power in a Libyan state that he effectively ran through his inner circle. He nationalized industry and property and hindered the private acquisition of wealth. He strengthened his own patronage networks with subsidies and political appointments that restricted access to state power and wealth to narrow vectors. Qaddafi's *Jamahiriya* (state of the masses) sought to create a "politicized public in which all members have access to power"[13]—but only under his control. This effectively neutered the political elite and traditional powerbrokers. Qaddafi also ensured that security services were loyal directly to him and his inner circle. He used informal organizations to police society at the institutional, tribal, and familial levels and kept the military weak and co-opted.[14] Qaddafi staffed his security services with selected tribes to cultivate loyalty.[15] He also sought to suppress or eliminate alternative political identities that could challenge his regime, among them non-Arab tribes and Islamists.

Qaddafi's ghost still haunts Libya. His power politics bred grievances among populations and powerbrokers who lacked access to power under the regime. These factions, now empowered after the revolution, fear both the perceived and real return of a regime that would remarginalize them. Qaddafi's *Jamahiriya* system also laid the groundwork for the pervasive factionalism that prolongs the current conflict by weakening traditional leadership, politicizing the population, and creating the perception of egalitarian power distribution. Qaddafi's buying of support from elites and poor alike[16] also manifests as a popular expectation for top-down cure-alls to society's current ills. His personalization of the regime created a vacuum of leadership and experience that has hindered Libya's transition.[17]

Governance and Power After Qaddafi. The 2011 revolution removed the pressure that Qaddafi had wielded to fragment and control Libyan society for decades. The result was a vacuum into which old currents resurfaced and new powers emerged to destabilizing effect.

The Fall of the Regime. Libya followed Tunisia and Egypt into the upheaval of the Arab Spring in February 2011, when anti-government protests broke out in Benghazi in response to the arrest of a human rights activist.[18] Protests quickly spread to the west. The opposition rapidly took Benghazi, while the regime tightened its grip on Tripoli, besieged rebel-held cities in the west, and advanced toward Benghazi.[19] The UN authorized NATO military action against the regime in March 2011.[20] The intervention initially turned the tide in the opposition's favor, but the conflict ultimately stalled until it abruptly ended with Qaddafi's death in October.[21]

The fractures in the opposition that would herald postrevolutionary chaos were apparent before Qaddafi's final fall. The initial mobilization began with secular activists and youth but quickly spread to other factions defined by ideology, tribe, locality, and opportunity.[22] Exiled Libyans returned after years or decades abroad to participate in, and in some cases lead, the revolution.[23] Generational divides surfaced as resigned officials and defected officers took over opposition leadership through the National Transitional Council (NTC), which won a contested bid for international recognition.[24] Competition within the NTC and between competing leadership networks, exacerbated by an overlapping web of external actors, hampered the opposition and set the stage for a turbulent postrevolutionary period.

Libya Without a Regime. The upending of the Libyan political order generated new models of power and allowed old systems to reemerge. A claim to revolutionary legitimacy became a requirement to

access power and resources. After the regime's fall, suppressed ethnic and ideological minorities were empowered, non-Arab tribes gained a high degree of self-rule,[25] and Islamists ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafi-jihadi groups surged.[26] Some core characteristics of the regime continued to shape the use of power in Libya. Control over state institutions remains a means to achieve direct wealth and influence over a constituency, rather than a public service in the national interest.

The revolution reversed the Qaddafi-era centralization of power. Armed groups now hold power over governance and political institutions, which rely on informal or semiformal relationships with militias to provide security and force.[27] National governance is almost nonexistent and has devolved to the municipal level. Politically active tribes, city-states, and other interest groups channel influence through elite networks. Tribes especially have filled the power vacuum by staffing local security forces, resolving disputes, overseeing governance, and organizing political force.[28] The rise of an increasingly institutionalized illicit economy allows criminal and militia syndicates to substitute for national governance in some areas.[29]

Libyan militias have popular legitimacy and access to both licit and illicit revenue streams. They draw legitimacy from their revolutionary status and ability to provide local security and basic services in the absence of an effective state.[30] Libya's nearly 2,000 militias employ more than 10 percent of the country's workforce and range in size from dozens to tens of thousands of fighters.[31] Many receive state funds through failed demobilization programs. Militias also have access to an illicit economy that sustains them and allows them to project force, control communities, and accrue wealth. They have an incentive to preserve a weak or nonexistent state to maintain access to illicit networks.[32]

Libya lacks a functioning national justice system. Conflict arbitration and mediation occur at the local or regional level, often brokered by tribes or revolutionary militias.[33] Armed groups administer their own justice or influence judicial bodies to advance their political goals. Torture occurs in militia-run prisons,

and kidnappings and arbitrary detentions are rampant.[34] Militias also wield influence over justice at the national level, including the Libyan Supreme Court.[35] Key issues in the constitutional drafting process remain unresolved.[36] Nor has Libya undergone a transitional justice process. Questions of reparations and property distribution, as well as the trials of major Qaddafi-era officials, are incomplete.

Civil society flourished in the immediate aftermath of the revolution but is currently weak.[37] The Qaddafi regime prevented the formation of a civil society capable of challenging state authority. Civil society organizations (CSOs) surged in 2011, especially in Benghazi where they provided government services. CSOs promoted national identity, advocated for disenfranchised groups, and fostered social cohesion. The rise of armed factions—and accompanying assassination campaigns—reversed the civil society boom.[38] The remaining CSOs operate primarily from outside Libya. They are either aligned with one of the rival governments or have limited impact.[39] Most CSOs have abandoned conflict resolution and governance objectives to focus on providing humanitarian aid.

The Failed Transition. The demise of Qaddafi and his personalized power structure made clear the consequences of the absence of a Libyan state. Political and military power became diffuse. The revolution destroyed the Libyan security sector, leaving a roiling patchwork of local and returned-from-exile political leadership, ex-officers, warlords, and tribal leaders in its place. Security and justice structures kept weak by the regime became localized,[40] with ties to tribes and localities becoming paramount. The international community did not provide a stabilization force but instead facilitated rushed elections that cemented Libya's factionalizing.[41] Transitional governments attempted to take control over the revolutionary brigades but instead legitimized and funded parallel security organization that in turn imposed their will on the government.[42] Warlords and militias grew increasingly powerful as they aligned with or influenced political factions. Militias operating outside their local areas became a source of conflict.

The Second War. Rival factions grappled for control of the new Libyan state. The election of the transitional General National Congress (GNC) in 2012 empowered Islamist politicians and militias.[43] Backlash against their rise and the GNC's failings came to a head in May 2014, when former Libyan Army general Khalifa Haftar began Operation Dignity to fight Islamists in Benghazi. Low-turnout elections for the House of Representatives (HoR) in June 2014 threatened the power of Islamist and related factions, which similarly turned to armed force to defend their interests. The Libya Dawn coalition, which comprised Islamist and non-Islamist fighters from Misrata, Tripoli, and other northwestern Libyan cities,[44] ousted pro-Dignity forces and the HoR from Tripoli in the summer of 2014. The HoR's flight to eastern Libya calcified the split between rival factions. Other currents, including eastern Libyan federalism,[45] also rose to secure their interests in response to the failure of Libya's new democratic institutions.[46] Regional states became increasingly involved in the Libya conflict during this period (see "External Actors"). Salafi-jihadi groups, including al Qaeda and ISIS, also became key players on the Libyan scene in the post-revolutionary period. (For a detailed assessment, see Appendix B.)

A Persistent Conflict. The civil war cooled as rival factions settled into entrenched positions in east and west, but the fundamental grievances that ignited the conflict remain unresolved. The political situation has become increasingly polarized, but the conflict is multilayered, not binary. Political and military actors have multiple identities that overlap but cannot be reduced to east versus west, Islamists versus secularists, old guard versus revolutionaries, Dignity versus Dawn, or GNC versus HoR.

The UN and other international players sought to resolve the conflict by negotiating the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), signed in December 2015.[47] The subsequent formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA) did not heal the rift but instead introduced a new power center that reordered the Libyan political crisis without resolving it. An ongoing effort to revise the LPA is an attempt to solve this problem,

but the rifts that caused the initial failure of the LPA's implementation remain apparent. The military state of play has gradually shifted in favor of Khalifa Haftar's forces, which control eastern Libya and have taken over key oil and military sites in Libya's center and south. However, no actor is strong enough to take control of Libya militarily.[48]

Qaddafi's legacy still looms large. The regime's neutering of traditional powerbrokers means that national-level players do not represent constituencies sufficient to deescalate the local conflict from the top down. Grievances from the regime era continue to animate the conflict. Popular fatigue with violence and chaos has opened the door to the return of regime figures, but revolutionary credentials remain a paramount consideration for previously marginalized groups that now seek to secure their positions in a revised Libyan state. Fear of the regime's return is a motivating factor for revolutionary forces alarmed by the prospect of a counterrevolution.

The Players

Political power is organized along several major axes. The GNA's creation in late 2015 reordered Libya's power map without resolving the conflicts that shaped the prior Operation Dignity–Operation Dawn split.[49] As with Dignity and Dawn, allegiances are changeable, alliances are loose, and spoilers exist both inside and outside the main power centers. Legitimacy is also contested in an environment in which nearly all governing bodies operate in a legal grey zone.

Different Islamist currents cut across the Libya conflict. Islamism is an ideology whose adherents believe that Islamic law or values should be the foundation for politics, law, and moral life.[50] Islamism is a broad spectrum that ranges from the pursuit of peaceful, gradualist change to violent revolution. The ideological variations that are most important for understanding the Libya conflict are:

- **"Mainstream" Islamism**,[51] whose followers pursue gradual (nonrevolutionary) change through existing state structures and political

processes, including secular and democratic institutions. It is most closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

- **Salafism**, whose followers seek to return to the fundamentals of Islam as practiced righteously by the earliest generation of Muslims (the *Salaf*).[52] Salafis generally focus on practice and *da'wa* over political action, although they may form political parties.[53] Salafis range from non-violent and politically disengaged "quietists" to an extreme minority that uses violence in pursuit of an orthodox Islamic state. This minority movement is **Salafi-jihadism**, whose followers believe that individual Muslims are obligated to use armed force to bring about a state governed by a Salafi interpretation of Islamic law.[54] Notable Salafi-jihadi groups include al Qaeda, ISIS, and Ansar al Sharia Libya.

Conditions cause individuals to move along a spectrum of Islamist ideology. The current conflict in Libya has pushed mainstream Islamists to align with militias that share their interests, although they continue to act through political parties and an associated network of religious leadership.[55] Libyan Salafis mobilized in political parties[56] and formed militias, including formerly quietist Salafis that took up arms in support of political leadership they viewed as legitimate.[57] The Libya conflict also allowed Salafi-jihadis to capture the support of Islamist individuals and groups who would have pursued their objectives nonviolently if conditions allowed.[58]

This appendix presents political and military actors together. The influence that armed actors wield over political institutions renders a division between the two meaningless.[59]

The GNA Axis. One power center revolves around a UN-backed unity government. This government is weak but has attracted supporters who use it to pursue their own interests. Its power is limited to the northwestern Libyan coast. It has international support and limited access to Libya's economic institutions.[60]

Government of National Accord. The GNA is a partially implemented UN-backed unity government that lacks independent armed forces. It was established by the signing of the UN-brokered LPA in Skhirat, Morocco, in December 2015. The GNA did not resolve the 2014 split between the HoR and the GNC as intended because it never achieved sufficient buy-in from eastern Libyan powerbrokers. The HoR, which is meant to become the GNA's legislature, has not passed legislation necessary to put the government into force.[61]

The GNA has several components:

- *Presidency Council.* The LPA established a nine-member executive council intended to represent Libya's main factions and regions.[62] Several members of anti-GNA factions are boycotting their positions on the council.[63]

- *High Council of State (HCS).* The HCS is a consultative body formed under the LPA from members of the former GNC parliament. The HCS is attempting to regain power through the ongoing renegotiation of the LPA.[64]

- *Cabinet.* The GNA has a partial cabinet that the HoR has refused to approve.[65] Some ministers-designate have acted in the GNA's interest while others have undermined it.[66]

Support from international actors and some Libyan factions made the GNA a reality despite the legal and practical problems with its implementation.[67] Many Libyans perceive the GNA as biased and not representative because of its association with Misratan powerbrokers, who seized influence by pledging loyalty, rallying an influence network in support,[68] and providing armed force. The international community hastened the GNA's formation to establish a legitimate government to authorize countermigration efforts and military action against ISIS in Libya.[69] The GNA's claim of success against ISIS does not stir enthusiasm from the Libyan population, which is concerned with more immediate threats, such as the economic crisis, power outages, instability, and crime.

Table A1. Libya Conflict: Major Blocs

Government of National Accord (GNA)	GNA	A partially implemented UN-backed unity government
	Misrata	A city-state that ascended in 2011 and led the GNA's counter-ISIS fight
	Al Bunyan al Marsous (BAM)	An officially GNA-led force of mainly Misratan militias that recaptured Sirte from ISIS
	Pro-GNA militias	A militia syndicate controlling Tripoli that nominally supports the GNA
Libyan National Army (LNA)	LNA	An anti-Islamist coalition of military units, tribal forces, and Salafi fighters that controls eastern Libya
	House of Representatives (HoR)	A formerly internationally recognized legislature whose leadership supports the LNA
	Zintan	A northwestern Libyan city-state aligned with the LNA
General National Congress (GNC)	GNC	A rump Islamist parliament that is attempting to regain power in Tripoli
	Pro-GNC militias	Islamist militias that support the GNC
Non-Arab Tribes	Tuareg	An ethnic group in southwestern Libya, Algeria, and the western Sahel
	Tebu	An ethnic group in southern Libya, Niger, and Chad
	Amazigh (Berber)	A Maghreb ethnic group based in northwestern Libya's Nafusa Mountains
Salafi-Jihadi Base	ISIS and al Qaeda affiliates and associates	Groups that seek to establish an Islamic polity by force, either Libya or internationally
Other	Qaddafi loyalists	Regime officials and supporters who retain influence but have not yet reclaimed power

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

GNA members cannot travel freely throughout many parts of Libya, much less implement effective government programs.[70]

The GNA made limited advances in 2016–17, but these gains mask the larger military, governance, and economic handicaps that prevent it from becoming an effective and accepted government. The GNA entered Tripoli in March 2016 after negotiations with the fractious militia syndicate that controls the capital. The GNA still relies on these militias for its nominal control over the capital, which they secured by ousting pro-GNC forces in May 2017.[71] However, the

GNA's inability to control allied forces is a liability, and militias' actions can compromise GNA interests and harm its negotiating positions.[72] The GNA is training a presidential guard but is not yet able to project significant power.[73] Its control over the Libyan Navy is also limited by fractiousness and poor command and control.[74]

Misrata. Misrata city is an economic hub and center of postrevolution power in western Libya. It functions as a city-state and is the population's primary source of social cohesion and identity. It was an opposition stronghold that the Qaddafi regime besieged in 2011. Misrata became militarized during the revolution. Its militias are semiprofessional with logistics and support units and demonstrate strong loyalty bonds between commanders, fighters, and community leaders.[75] It has extremely limited air power.[76] Many Misratan militias have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups and draw support from Qatar and Turkey.[77] Some Misratan powerbrokers support Salafi-jihadi groups, such as the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council, to counter anti-Islamist forces such as Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA).[78]

Misratan forces generally share the goals of defending Misrata and preserving its political and economic influence, but they are far from monolithic. Misratan militias participated in the Libya Dawn alliance in the 2014 civil war, but ultimately split over whether to defend the GNC government in Tripoli or abstain from conflicts beyond defending Misrata. The arrival of the GNA hardened a split between moderate and hardline Islamist Misratan forces.[79] Mainstream Misratan forces accepted the GNA as a means to secure international backing, while more hardline militias remained in the GNC camp. This split is widening as moderate Misratan political and military leaders marginalize hardliners in a bid for a political deal with the increasingly powerful LNA axis.[80]

Misratan forces formed the al Bunyan al Marsous (BAM) coalition under the GNA's auspices in 2016 to seized Sirte from ISIS, which had begun to encroach on core Misratan interests.[81] Misratan leadership retained command and control of its forces despite nominal allegiance to the GNA. Misratan forces leveraged the counter-ISIS campaign to take tenuous control of Sirte and extend their influence toward the oil crescent.

Misrata's military power has contracted in 2017 despite its influence in the GNA. Casualties suffered in the Sirte campaign are a factor.[82] Misratan forces also withdrew from Tripoli, in part to deescalate tensions with Zintan, a mainly pro-Haftar enclave in the northwest.[83] The LNA's rise has also challenged Misratan power. The Misratan Third Force was the primary security force in Fezzan until May 2017, when it effectively ceded control of the southwest and parts of central Libya to the LNA.[84] This consolidation may reflect an increasingly defensive focus as the LNA expands westward.

Pro-GNA Tripoli Militias. Several of Tripoli's most powerful militia commanders are nominally aligned with the GNA. The city's security landscape is extremely fragmented as groups compete for control of individual neighborhoods.[85] Pro-GNA military and political leaders brokered a deal with militia commanders to allow the GNA to enter Tripoli through its port in March 2016.[86] The Tripoli Revolutionaries' Brigade, the capital's largest militia, is nominally allied with the GNA and played a leading role in ousting mutual adversaries from the capital in May–June 2017.[87] However, its interests do not always align with those of the GNA, making for a fragile partnership.[88] The GNA also relies on the Abu Salim Central Security force[89] and the Rada Special Deterrence force, a Salafi group that recognizes the GNA as the legitimate political authority in Tripoli. Rada is critical for controlling Maetiga airport and some counterterrorism capabilities, but it is also divisive.[90]

Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. Long persecuted by Qaddafi, the Brotherhood organized in 2011 but failed to gain the popular support of its counterparts in Egypt or Tunisia during the 2012 or 2014 Libyan elections.[91] Its political arm, the Justice and Construction Party, was allied with the GNC and the Libya Dawn coalition in the 2014 civil war. The Brotherhood party later participated in the Libyan Political Agreement

Table A2. Powerbrokers: GNA Axis

Fayez al Serraj	GNA prime minister–designate and head of the Presidency Council—a technocrat chosen by consensus who lacks his own constituency
Ahmed Maetig	GNA deputy prime minister representing Misrata
Abdul Rahman al Swehli	Misratan politician and leader of the High Council of State who wields influence in Tripoli
Abdulrahman al Tawil	GNA chief of staff and UN security liaison who negotiated the GNA's entry into Tripoli
Haithem Tajouri	Key warlord in Tripoli who nominally supports the GNA and commander of the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade
Abdel Raouf Kara	Key warlord in Tripoli who nominally supports the GNA and commander of the Rada Special Deterrence Force
Mohammed Sawan	Chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood's political party
Mehdi al Barghathi	GNA defense minister–designate who rallied Islamist militias to challenge Haftar in the oil crescent

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

and has maintained support for the GNA.[92] The 2014 election weakened the Brotherhood, which has also lost popular support due to the rise of armed Islamist groups seen as more effective. The Brotherhood's support for the GNA is a bid to recapture legitimacy and secure its power in the future Libyan state. Its primary opponent is Haftar.[93]

The LNA Axis. This axis is based in eastern Libya and centers on the Libyan National Army militia coalition and the HoR parliament. It pursues an anti-Islamist agenda and seeks to secure a level of eastern Libyan autonomy.

Libyan National Army. The LNA is a loose coalition of military, anti-Islamist, tribal, and federalist forces that controls more than three-quarters of Libya. The LNA and its allies comprise Libya's largest fighting force, totaling between 35,000 and 50,000 fighters.[94] Its capabilities include tanks, heavy weapons, and limited

air assets. The LNA includes former army and air force units, but the bulk of the force is not professional.[95] The LNA's military power relies on foreign backing, notably from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, and Russia (see "External Actors").

The LNA's commander is Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, a former Libyan Army general who defected in the 1980s.[96] He joined the CIA-trained anti-Qaddafi resistance and lived in the US for two decades, becoming an American citizen. Haftar returned to Libya during the 2011 revolution in a bid to lead the rebel army. He failed to attract immediate support and instead spent several years building influence and a militia force, the LNA. Haftar nominally answers to the HoR but in practice operates independently.[97] His primary objectives are defeating Islamists in Libya, reestablishing the dominance of military officers over militias,[98] and securing his own power. Haftar launched Operation Dignity in May 2014 to recapture Benghazi from Islamist and Salafi-jihadi militants,

announcing victory in 2017.[99] He is now positioning himself for a political role and will likely run for president. He is emboldened by foreign support and seeks to take control of Tripoli.

The LNA is ascendant. Haftar has significant popular support in the east and is gaining an international profile. He is credited with curbing militants' assassination campaign in Benghazi and returning normalcy to parts of the city. The LNA controls more than half of Libya's oil terminals and has made important gains in central, southwestern, and northwestern Libya throughout 2017.[100] Haftar's opponents cannot counter the air power that Egypt and the UAE bring to bear. Haftar's facility for tribal negotiations has expanded his coalition over time. His political allies in the HoR and the GNA's Presidency Council block provisions that run counter to Haftar's interests. The LNA has increasingly replaced elected civilian leaders with military governors,[101] increasing Haftar's governing control over eastern Libya.

However, the LNA has critical weaknesses that limit its potential for future expansion and preservation of power.[102] The fight for Benghazi has suppressed divisions within the LNA's coalition that include tribal lines and divergent positions on Islamists. Haftar's campaign also worsened grievances in the city, where its ostensibly anti-Islamist mission included displacing populations along tribal and regional lines.[103] LNA forces' lack of professionalism will continue to drive these grievances, especially if the LNA refuses to curb abuses and war crimes.[104] The LNA's advance, accompanied by unresolved grievances, is a rallying cry for Salafi-jihadi groups and other actors that see Haftar as a second coming of Qaddafi.[105]

House of Representatives. The Libyan House of Representatives is a parliament based in Tobruk in eastern Libya. It fled Tripoli after Islamist and western Libyan militias took the city in response to the HoR's election in 2014. The HoR is meant to become the GNA's legislature according to the Libyan Political Agreement.[106] HoR leadership has blocked the GNA's implementation[107] and seeks to regain international recognition as Libya's sole democratically elected body. The US sanctioned the HoR's leader, Speaker

Ageela Saleh Issa, for obstructing the GNA.[108] Saleh's actions have supported Haftar, but Saleh is an independent actor who seeks to maintain and increase his own political power.

The HoR is fragmented. Saleh's cadre controls the HoR's agenda and has blocked the legislative action required to recognize the GNA. Delegates from western and southern Libya are boycotting.[109] A guiding objective for the pro-LNA HoR leadership is to secure eastern Libyan political representation and access to resources. This drive is a legacy of western Libyan economic dominance, exacerbated by Qaddafi's processes and the imbalance between northwestern Libya's larger population and eastern Libya's natural resources. The HoR recognizes a rival interim government based in the east that runs parallel economic institutions and governing bodies intended to challenge the GNA.[110]

Zintan. Zintan is a city-state that is the LNA's primary bastion of support in northwestern Libya. Zintani militias include brigades that absorbed former Qaddafi-regime forces and rely primarily on the UAE for support.[111] Zintani forces played a key role in the 2011 revolution[112] and participated in Haftar's Operation Dignity in 2014 before losing control of Tripoli to Libya Dawn forces in 2014.[113] Zintan's primary interest is its position among other powers in western Libya, including representation and access to oil revenues. Zintani militias wield influence on the national stage by disrupting oil production to secure representation and access to resources.[114] Zintan is divided between moderate leadership that seeks compromise with rivals and more hardline factions that seek to fight for a Zintani stake in Tripoli.[115]

Madkhali Salafis. Madkhalism is a type of "quietist" Salafism led by a Saudi cleric that promotes obedience to a legitimate ruler and opposes political Islam. In Libya, Madkhalis generally tolerate Haftar or support him as legitimate. Several Madkhali Salafi units, likely Saudi-backed, fight with Haftar's LNA in Benghazi.[116] These units are part of a growing trend of Salafi influence in eastern Libya that has produced controversial conservative laws and rulings.[117] Haftar has courted

Salafis and allowed Saudi clerics to preach in the areas he controls as part of an effort to build conservative religious support.[118] Efforts to disband Salafi units and integrate them into the broader LNA have spread Salafi influence.[119] Madkhalis outside eastern Libya are a potential vector for the expansion of Haftar's power.[120]

Technocrats. A cadre of secularist-technocratic leaders led the 2011 National Transitional Council but lost influence as militias and factions proliferated. Many of these leaders are laying the groundwork to run or support candidates in proposed 2018 elections.[121] They draw strength from wealth and external connections, including long-standing ties to the West and the UAE, but do not control forces on the ground. They are aligned with the HoR against Islamist powerbrokers but are wary of the rise of Haftar as a threat to their political leadership.[122]

The GNC Axis. This axis comprises hardline Islamist political leaders and a militia syndicate on which they rely. This grouping is unlikely to regain power but is a potential spoiler in northwestern Libya. Elements of

this axis overlap with and facilitate—but are not necessarily a part of—the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base (see Appendix B).

General National Congress. The GNC is a rump Islamist parliament that seeks to regain power in Tripoli. The GNC took power from the unelected NTC after Libya's free and fair elections in 2012. Islamist parties and individuals won a minority of seats for factions that included the Muslim Brotherhood's party, smaller Salafi and nationalist parties, and an ultraconservative bloc.[124] The GNC's mandate ended in 2014 with the election of the HoR. However, Islamist and western Libyan powerbrokers refused to leave power and allied with the Libya Dawn coalition to drive the HoR from Tripoli and reinstate the GNC.[125]

Former GNC leaders and hardline Islamist elements—a fragment of the former GNC bloc—seek to supplant the GNA and reinstate the National Salvation Government (NSG). They are spoilers who are too weak to retake Tripoli but can undermine security in the capital and its environs.[126] GNA-allied militias drove GNC-allied forces out of Tripoli in May and

Table A3. Powerbrokers: LNA Axis

Khalifa Haftar	LNA commander seeking to become a national political and/or military leader
Ageela Salah	HoR speaker, who is responsible for blocking GNA implementation
Abdul Razzaq al Nazhori	LNA chief of staff responsible for militarizing eastern Libyan governance
Mahmoud Jibril	Secularist political leader and former NTC chair seeking to regain power in 2018
Ali Zeidan	Former prime minister seeking to regain power in 2018
Aref Ali Nayed	Former ambassador to UAE and moderate religious scholar possibly preparing for 2018 presidential run
Wanis Bukhamada	Key LNA commander for operations in Benghazi and the oil crescent[123]
Ali Kanna	LNA-linked military commander in the Fezzan
Abdullah al Thinni	Prime minister of Beida interim government

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

June 2017.[127] The US sanctioned NSG Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell for obstructing the GNA and undermining stability.[128]

Pro-GNC Islamist and Salafi Militias. GNC political leadership relies on a syndicate of armed groups to pursue its interests. Militias pursue their interests by occupying government and infrastructure sites and by kidnapping officials.[129] This syndicate draws on the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) human network and Qatari and Turkish support. The GNC bloc's primary military support is Jabhat al Somoud (Steadfastness Front), a Turkish-backed Misratan Islamist force.[130] Other key components that have challenged the GNA are the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room and the so-called Libyan National Guard.[131] Some militia leaders have moved away from outright military action to wield political and economic power, but their influence remains tied to armed groups on the ground.[132]

Many militias in the GNC bloc are responsive to Grand Mufti Sadiq al Ghariani, the former head of Libya's state religious authority. Ghariani issued a *fatwa* in 2011 that mobilized opposition against Qaddafi in Tripoli.[133] He is seen as extreme by many Libyans. Ghariani wields influence through armed groups for which he is a religious guide.

Benghazi Defense Brigades (*BDB*). The BDB is a militia coalition that straddles the GNC axis and the Salafi-jihadi base. Its leadership includes Islamist-leaning former military officers and members of Salafi-jihadi coalitions with ties to Ansar al Sharia.[134] Mufti Sadiq al Ghariani is a spiritual leader for the group, who also has apparent ties to forces within the al Qaeda network. The BDB's stated goal is to return internally displaced persons (IDPs) displaced by Haftar's campaign in Benghazi,[135] but the participation of former Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) militants in the BDB likely indicates a larger ambition that includes establishing an Islamic emirate in the city.

The BDB is the primary mechanism for the pro-GNC bloc's campaign against Haftar. It has challenged LNA control in the oil crescent and Fezzan region.[136] The BDB has now gone to ground following several failed campaigns. Its involvement in a massacre of LNA recruits and civilians at Brak al Shati in May 2017[137] pushed Misrata, which had supported the BDB, to sever ties with the group and crack down on its leadership.[138] The BDB offered to disband following the incident,[139] but elements of the group are still active. Its alienation may be pushing it to coordinate with ISIS.[140]

Table A4. Powerbrokers: GNC Axis

Sadiq al Ghariani	Former Grand Mufti who is aligned with hardline Islamist groups and denounces the GNA and LNA[141]
Khalifa Ghwell	National Salvation Government prime minister seeking to regain power
Ali al Sallabi	Muslim Brotherhood–linked spiritual leader and Qatari interlocutor
Nouri Abusahmain	Former GNC speaker and prominent Amazigh politician
Abdelhakim Belhaj	Former LIFG emir who became a revolutionary leader and political figure
Mostafa al Sharkasi	Islamist-leaning former officer and BDB commander
Saleh Badi	Islamist Misratan leader of the Jabhat al Somoud militia

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

Other Actors. Several political and military factions do not fit into the three main blocs outlined above, although they may oppose or ally with elements of the blocs.

The Salafi-Jihadi Base. Salafi-jihadi armed groups in Libya include transnational organizations such as al Qaeda and ISIS, which seek to use force to reshape the Muslim world. This base also includes Salafi-jihadi groups that focus on changing Libyan state and society but provide support for transnational groups. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base is discussed in detail in Appendix B.

Non-Arab Tribes. Qaddafi alternately co-opted, marginalized, and disenfranchised non-Arab tribes in Libya. These groups have gained autonomy since 2011 but still face discrimination and lack access to resources through licit channels.

The *Amazigh* (Berber) are an indigenous Maghreb group based in the Nafusa Mountains in northwestern Libya[142] and throughout northern Africa.[143] Qaddafi denied Amazigh identity. The group now focuses on gaining political representation,[144] securing land rights, and maintaining access to smuggling routes. Amazigh fighters participated in the Libya Dawn coalition, and the group remains aligned with Misrata and the Tuareg. Tensions exist between Amazigh and Arabs in Zintan, a dual-ethnic community threatened by Amazigh nationalism. Amazigh face a threat from increasingly powerful Salafis in Libya, some of whom condemn the Ibadi Islam that many Amazigh practice.[145]

The *Tuareg and Tebu* are stateless nations based in southern Libya and neighboring states. The Tebu and the Tuareg control the southern Libyan border and parts of the smuggling economy. Postrevolutionary jockeying for control of lucrative illicit networks led to the breakdown of a century-old peace agreement between the Tuareg and the Tebu in 2014.[146] Violence between the two tribes has since de-escalated, with the Tebu and allied forces in the LNA bloc now predominating in much of the south.

The Tuareg are a seminomadic ethnic group living in Libya, Algeria, Mali, and Niger. Qaddafi promised them citizenship for their support in the revolution.[147] Libyan Tuareg played a role in the 2012 rebellion in neighboring Mali, during which al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) gained access to some Tuareg networks.[148] The Tuareg economy relies on trafficking weapons, drugs, and people. Tuareg militias operate in southwestern Libya and have cooperated with Misratan forces to control key oil fields, but they have lost influence with the withdrawal of Misratan forces from Fezzan.

The Tebu are an ethnic group located in southern Libya, Niger, and Chad. Tebu have historically lacked citizenship and faced discrimination from Arab Libyans. They frequently clash with Arab tribes for control of key southern hubs such as Sebha and Kufra.[149] The Tebu patrol Libya's southern border and have increased their control over smuggling routes and illicit military transfers since 2011, particularly through Niger and Sudan. The Tebu are allied with the LNA to control oil sites and have partnered with Zintan to smuggle weapons and other cargo.[150] The Tebu Sultan declared support for the LNA in September 2017 in an unprecedented move away from non-alignment that likely signals calculations about the LNA's growing power.[151] The LNA has supported the Arab Zwai tribe against the Tebu in Kufra, however, signaling persistent tensions.[152]

Regime Loyalists. Qaddafi-regime loyalists retain political power and influence but have yet to reclaim official positions in Libya. They are aligned with the LNA bloc more than other actors but are an independent power center that seeks to recapture influence in the state.

Regime figures are gaining acceptance in some constituencies due to Libyans' fatigue with the current crisis.[153] Members of the Qaddafi family have endorsed Haftar as a route to stability for Libya.[154] The most important regime figure is Saif al Islam al Qaddafi, Muammar al Qaddafi's heir apparent. A Zintani militia released Saif al Islam from house arrest in June 2017.[155] He is a savvy operator who has interfaced with the international community and brokered deals with Islamists in the past. Saif al Islam escaped Libya after his release but is reportedly planning a return

Table A5. Powerbrokers: Other

Saif al Islam al Qaddafi	Muammar al Qaddafi's heir apparent, who may reenter politics
Basit Igtet	Swiss-Libyan businessman with Western and Islamist connections running for president in 2018[156]
Mustafa Sanalla	Chairman of the National Oil Corporation
Sadiq al Kebir	Governor of the Central Bank of Libya
Bashir Saleh	Qaddafi-regime investment head who may run for office in 2018[157]

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

to political life.[158] Both Haftar and UN Special Envoy Ghassan Salame have indicated the potential for a political role for Saif,[159] although he remains more likely to wield power from behind the scenes.

Regime loyalists may be gaining some influence on the ground in Tripoli, although it remains limited. Several high-level regime figures are in the custody of Haithem Tajouri, a GNA-aligned militia leader who sees them as an opportunity to increase his stature.[160] Loyalist militias are also forming in Tripoli.[161]

Loyalist tribes and communities marginalized after the revolution are a likely vector for support if a loyalist political or military current reemerge. Some of these tribes built relationships of necessity with Salafi-jihadi groups but do not generally support Salafi-jihadi ideology.[162]

State of Play

The political, economic, and military situation in Libya is complex and involves many local, regional, and international actors.

The Political Situation. The UN Support Mission in Libya reconvened peace talks under a new action plan in September 2017 but the talks ended after one month without a clear way forward.[163] The current process includes delegations from the HoR, representing eastern Libyan interests, and the GNA's High Council of State, representing the west. The talks

sought to amend the Libyan Political Agreement of December 2015. The deadlock reflects issues that have hindered LPA implementation since its inception, particularly Haftar's role in a future political or military structure.[164] The UN's credibility is limited due to past scandals and perceived ineffectiveness, as well as the GNA's failure to deliver services and secure buy-in from enough Libyan constituencies.

Several regional and international actors work alongside and in place of the UN process to pursue their interests in Libya through diplomatic channels. Egypt and the UAE have brokered talks between LNA commander Haftar and GNA head Fayez al Serraj in a bid to secure Haftar's power and commit him to a non-military solution with potential for international backing. Egypt has also opened talks with Haftar's political rivals in Misrata and worked with Algeria and Tunisia to pursue a regionally brokered peace. The African Union has similarly sought to begin a regional process. French President Emmanuel Macron entered the ring as a potential broker in July 2017 with an unenforceable ceasefire agreement between Haftar and Serraj. These competing agreements emboldened Haftar while causing fracturing within the GNA coalition.

The current political situation is characterized by a march toward elections in 2018 despite several roadblocks. Legal challenges to Libya's as-yet-unapproved draft constitution abound, and key parties have boycotted the drafting process.[165] The Libyan High National Election Commission is a neutral body but lacks the capacity to administer national elections

in the current environment.[166] The prospect of elections is also generating political and military jockeying that undermines the UN's efforts to broker a deal among competing factions. This political deadlock opens space for military actors to pursue their interests on the ground.

The Ground Situation. The ground situation is critical because armed actors, not political leaders, wield the most power in Libya today. A political solution is not possible without their participation.

The military balance tipped in favor of Khalifa Haftar's LNA in 2017. Egyptian and Emirati support helped the LNA win a series of victories against the rival GNA-Misratan bloc.[167] The LNA and allied groups control the bulk of Libya's oil infrastructure, excluding some key chokepoints in the northwest. Haftar is positioning to gain influence over these chokepoints, however, as well as build alliances with militias in the northwest.[168] Conflict has decreased with the LNA's advance but will likely resume as the LNA encroaches on the core interests of its opponents in the northwest.

Several Libyan cities are in a state of flux that portends increased violence. Tripoli is unstable, already beset by violence between rival militias.[169] It may erupt if the LNA makes a play for influence. The LNA has tightened its grip on Benghazi and Ajdabiya, but persistent grievances and the LNA's limitations make an Islamist insurgency in either city likely in the next year. The LNA encircled Derna, but the main battle for the city—which is controlled by an al Qaeda–linked group—is yet to come. Sirte, under the tenuous control of Misratan forces, faces a power struggle and an encroaching ISIS presence as it seeks to rebuild. Sabratha, a key trafficking hub in the northwest, has a tenuous ceasefire after weeks of fighting between rival militias. Persistent grievances from the postrevolutionary period and before remain a source of instability in communities across Libya, where they facilitate militancy and trafficking even if they do not shape the larger political situation (see Figure 1).

The Economy. The Libyan economy is floundering due to instability, lack of government control, and a surging black market. The current crisis is a dramatic reversal for the country, which had one of Africa's highest standards of living before 2011 despite economic development gaps.[170] Persistent conflict and decreased oil production caused a sharp downturn in the Libyan economy that has yielded a spiraling deficit, uncontrolled inflation, and a severe liquidity crisis.[171] The GNA lacks an official budget, and its expenses far exceed its revenues.[172] Economic improvement is critical for resolving the Libyan political crisis and establishing a government accepted by the Libyan people.

Fundamental structural challenges require resolution to build a functioning Libyan state. The country's large public sector is unsustainable.[173] The population is accustomed to high fuel and food subsidies, which power the regional black market and cripple the national economy.[174]

Banking and Liquidity. Citizens face a liquidity crisis and lack of access to credit.[175] Most people can only attempt to access cash through the black market's prohibitively high exchange rates.[176] The liquidity crisis contributes to declining standards of living and rising food insecurity.

The liquidity crisis stems partly from the public's lack of trust in the government and economic institutions, which leads to cash hoarding. Qaddafi encouraged this trend with inconsistent and radical economic policies that included harmful populist reforms.[177] More recent problems, such as foreign currency smuggling, exacerbate the problem.[178] More than half of Libyan currency is currently circulating outside the licit economy.[179]

Corruption and crime are also rampant. The Qaddafi regime set a precedent for corruption and abuse of power that has continued, if not worsened, in the postrevolutionary period.[180] Militias intimidate the banks, undermining public confidence in the banking system.[181] They also facilitate fraudulent lending that siphons off Libya's foreign reserves.[182]

Critical Institutions. Libya's economy relies on a web of semisovereign institutions.[183] These institutions had significant independence from Qaddafi's political

system, which allowed them to operate effectively. The postrevolutionary political crisis has complicated their operations by producing parallel institutions responsive to rival players in the fragmented political field.[184]

The most important of these institutions are the National Oil Corporation (NOC), the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), and the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA). The LIA is marginalized due to its inability to access Libya's wealth, much of which is frozen.[185]

The CBL receives Libya's oil revenues but is blocking the GNA from accessing them due to concerns that funds will be siphoned off by corruption or malign actors.[186] The absence of an official budget is also a critical stumbling block, as is an unresolved political competition between rival claimants to CBL leadership.[187]

The NOC brought many of Libya's oil-producing capabilities back online in the past year. NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanalla has pursued a successful strategy of local engagement to dramatically reduce the impact of militia blockades on oil production, but major challenges remain.[188]

Oil. Oil is Libya's lifeblood. Steady oil production is critical for Libya's economic recovery, although diversification is required in the long term. Oil production is returning to prerevolution levels, but recovery remains hindered by damaged infrastructure and low oil prices.[189]

The ongoing contest for control of Libya's oil resources perpetuates violence, hinders political dialogue, and reverberates into regional and global markets. Armed actors obstruct oil production to press for political concessions and prevent rivals from accessing resources.[190] Armed competition for control over oil often impedes production and sometimes damages infrastructure. It has decreased with the LNA's growing power over oil infrastructure, but these sites remain a priority target for anti-LNA militias and Salafi-jihadi groups.[191] The centralization of the oil economy gives Salafi-jihadi groups and other armed actors the opportunity to cause asymmetric effects by damaging oil sites.

Conflict Economy and Trafficking. The licit economy does not provide a viable alternative for many Libyans, who rely on the smuggling economy for their livelihoods. For example, migrant smuggling generates more than $300 million annually for coastal communities in northwestern Libya.[192] Other key components of the illicit economy include weapons smuggling,[193] which began with massive outflows from Qaddafi's arsenals and oil smuggling,[194] facilitated by fuel subsidies.

Human trafficking networks in Libya are increasingly transnational and consolidated.[195] The ability of criminal actors to coordinate across borders and manage large-scale operations is growing. Libyan "linchpins" play a key coordinating role.[196] This economy relies on *hawala* banking and trust relationships. The trafficking economy also drives auxiliary kidnapping rackets.

The illicit economy supports actors who have an interest in continuing the conflict and preventing the rise of a strong Libyan state.[197] Warlords, businessmen, politicians, and select tribal groups have amassed significant wealth since 2011.[198] The illicit economy is increasingly institutionalized in Libya.[199] Some local councils are implicated in or have legitimized smuggling. Militias protect the illicit economy, even if they do not participate in it directly.[200] Militias benefit from trafficking and pass on benefits to communities. Smuggling networks support Salafi-jihadi groups but are not defined or led by them. Some key actors in the networks hold multiple roles that tie them to Salafi-jihadi groups, militias, criminal organizations, and tribes.

Humanitarian Situation. Libya is an impending humanitarian crisis. International aid for Libya surged after the revolution, but the current aid response is insufficient to meet needs.[201] Deteriorating conditions in Libya forced the aid response to shift from governance development to humanitarian and emergency response. Social services have collapsed. About 1.3 million people in Libya require humanitarian assistance.[202] Aspects of the humanitarian crisis include:

- *Health System.* More than one million Libyans lack access to essential medicines and lifesaving care.[203] The bulk of the country's health care facilities have either incomplete or absent services.

- *Food Insecurity.* Food insecurity is growing due to the economic crisis, disrupted food production, and prolonged displacement of populations.[204] It affects migrants as well as IDP and returnee populations, whose displacement and subsequent lack of access to services drive grievances that prolong communal conflict.

- *Water Insecurity.* Access to drinking water is decreasing as the Libya crisis continues.[205] Water infrastructure is a likely flashpoint for future conflict.[206] Sanitation and hygiene services are also degraded because of the economic crisis,[207] raising the risk of public health emergencies that the health system cannot handle.

- *IDPs.* IDPs increasingly returned to their home regions in 2017, but thousands of IDP and returnee households face major challenges with access to food, water, health care, shelter, and other critical needs.[208] Displacement caused by armed conflict has become a driver of armed conflict by aggrieved groups seeking to return to their communities.[209]

- *Education.* The Libyan education system is suffering due to instability, political deadlock, infrastructure problems, and insufficient resources.[210] Education gaps worsen instability in the short term and have a long-term negative effect on both security and the economy.

- *Electrical Grid.* Rolling blackouts caused by technical deficiencies and structural economic problems affect large swaths of Libya's population, threatening health care facilities and worsening living conditions.[211]

- *Human Trafficking.* Migrants face horrific conditions that include slave markets and widespread sexual assault and violence.[212]

- *Violence Against Civilians.* Civilians face threats from unexploded ordnance, direct attacks on civilians by militias and Salafi-jihadi groups, and gender-based violence.[213]

External Actors. Libya is increasingly embroiled in regional and global conflicts. Foreign powers and regional states are pursuing a broad and often contradictory range of objectives in the country. External actors did not create the Libya conflict, but they prolong it by supporting rival factions and emboldening spoilers.

The 2011 revolution made Libya a battleground for regional competition. Rivalries between opposition factions produced competing patronage networks. Differing policies in even the relatively unified NATO block empowered some factions over others.[214] Qatari military and financial support empowered Islamist and Misratan networks in western Libya, prioritizing former LIFG leadership with demonstrated military capabilities.[215] A secularist nexus supported by the UAE and France crystallized in response to the Qatari intervention.[216] Foreign backing heightened the 2014 Libyan political crisis, which effectively partitioned the government into eastern and western administrations tied to competing regional spheres of influence.[217]

Libya has become a front for regional competitions. Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan are acting in Libya in part to weaken the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists, which they see as a dire threat to their regimes.[218] Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan support Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood–affiliated groups in Libya. The Gulf diplomatic crisis that began in June 2017 is an escalation in the regional response to Qatar's pro-Brotherhood foreign policy, which has at least temporarily reduced Qatar's influence in Libya and bolstered anti-Islamist factions.[219]

Libya's power vacuum and strategic location also invite geopolitical jockeying. Egypt's investment in

Haftar reflects both immediate security concerns and a broader effort to establish a sphere of economic and political influence in Libya's east.[220] Limited Algerian engagement is intended to counter Egyptian power.[221] Sudan, Chad, and rebel forces from both countries are embroiled in the Libya conflict as an extension of domestic conflicts. European states are competing for leadership in Libya.[222] Separately, Russia is opportunistically increasing its influence in Libya in pursuit of economic and military gains at the West's expense.

Egypt. Egypt's involvement in Libya is an extension of President Abdel Fatah al Sisi's response to domestic challenges: Salafi-jihadi attacks, political Islam, and the economy. Egypt seeks to stabilize eastern Libya and secure the Egyptian-Libyan border[223] in order to prevent Salafi-jihadi groups from using Libya as a base from which to support Egypt-based militants or directly attack the Egyptian homeland. Sisi seeks to defeat political and militant Islamists in Libya, particularly in the east, as a continuation of his campaign to crush the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.[224] Egypt also has a significant economic stake in Libya, which provided cheap oil, investment, opportunities for Egyptian businesses, and remittances before the current crisis.[225]

Egypt provides military support for the LNA and conducts direct-action operations when required to secure its interests—which include retaliating against ISIS and weakening the LNA's opponents.[226] Egypt has provided aircraft, training, advising, and logistics to the LNA.[227] Egyptian and Emirati air support has enabled the LNA to make significant territorial gains against political rivals, who lack comparable air assets.[228]

Egypt and its allies seek to broker a political deal either within or outside the UN process[229] that secures Haftar's power and shapes an acceptable Libyan state. Haftar has resisted some of Egypt's efforts to reach a political rather than military solution to the conflict, but still relies on Egyptian support.[230] Egypt has in turn sought to secure external support for Haftar, with the most success in facilitating Russian backing.[231] Cairo is also a haven for Qaddafi-regime figures, who retain significant wealth and influence in Libya.[232]

Egyptian and Emirati backing helped Haftar make significant gains in the past year. However, Egypt's anti-Islamist campaign is a driving force in the Libya conflict. The closing of political space in Egypt, exemplified by the 2013 coup overthrowing the Brotherhood-backed president Mohammed Morsi, was a key factor in Libyan Islamists' decision to not affiliate with Libya's transitional governments.[233] The threat of an Egyptian-backed regime in Libya encourages pro-Islamist powerbrokers to support Libyan armed groups against Haftar and his allies.[234]

United Arab Emirates. The UAE views Libya as a counterterrorism mission, a front in its regional battle against Islamism, and a training ground for the expansion of Emirati regional influence. It provided broad material support and advisers during the 2011 revolution, ultimately developing a secularist patronage network in opposition to Qatari support for Islamists.[235]

The UAE provides direct military and materiel support to the LNA to fight Islamist militants and Salafi-jihadi groups. This support includes armored vehicles and aircraft, which have proved decisive.[236] The UAE built out a forward operating base at al Khadim in northeastern Libya in 2016 to fly bombers and surveillance drones in support of LNA campaigns.[237] Libya is a live training ground for the Emiratis as part of a larger effort to generate outsized influence on regional conflicts.

The UAE, like Egypt, has sought to broker an alternative political solution to the UN process. Emirati officials brought Haftar and GNA head Fayez al Serraj together in Abu Dhabi in May 2017.[238] This and subsequent meetings increased Haftar's clout and sowed discord in the GNA's fractious coalition, which includes many staunch Haftar opponents. The UAE has sought to draw Misratan powerbrokers away from the GNA and into a separate agreement with Haftar.[239]

Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia seeks to protect its status as a regional power, support its allies in the fight against political Islam, and counter Salafi-jihadi groups. It has provided financial and materiel support to the LNA[240] and leveraged Salafi groups as a means of wielding influence in Libya. Followers of the Saudi

cleric Rabee al Madkhali, who advocates obedience to political leaders, have rallied in support of Haftar.[241] Haftar has welcomed Saudi clerics as a force for social control and a source of conservative religious support.[242] Saudi Arabia may have also attempted to leverage tribal links to broker reconciliation.[243]

Jordan. Jordan seeks to fight Salafi-jihadi groups while balancing its allies' interests. Jordan has an agreement with the LNA to train troops in both Jordan and Libya.[244] Jordanian special operators have also assisted Western special operators in Libya.[245]

Russia. Russia is playing an opportunistic geopolitical game in Libya. It seeks to challenge the influence of the US and NATO in the Mediterranean and pressure Europe from the south. Russia's play in Libya is an extension of a larger campaign to rebuild the historical Soviet footprint in North Africa at the expense of the US, NATO, and the EU.

Russia seeks to reduce the influence of the US and its allies. One of Russian President Vladimir Putin's grand strategic objectives is to reverse the Soviet Cold War defeat.[246] Russia is pursuing this objective militarily by contesting the Mediterranean Sea. Russian engagement in Libya is a continuation of its strategy in Syria, where it has established air and naval bases on the eastern Mediterranean.[247] Russia reportedly seeks military basing in Libya, where the Soviet Union had several military positions.[248] Basing in Libya would extend the Russian sphere of influence into the central Mediterranean.

Russia supports Haftar's LNA in a bid to increase its military influence in Libya under the guise of counterterrorism support. Haftar has requested Russian military support at least four times since July 2016.[249] Russian military contractors and likely special operators have assisted Haftar's forces inside Libya and from western Egypt.[250] Russia publicly supports the UN arms embargo on Libya, although it may have provided the LNA with at least one aircraft and may intend to route arms to the LNA through Algeria.[251]

Russia's support for the LNA is also a bid for influence with Egypt. Russia seeks to peel Egypt, one of Haftar's primary backers, away from the US sphere of influence. The deployment of Russian special operators to western Egypt—ostensibly in support of operations in Libya—is a step change in increasingly close ties.[252] Support for the LNA may also improve relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which oppose Russia's actions in Syria.

Russia seeks to posture itself as a mediator and leader of the counter-ISIS fight, much as it has in Syria. It officially supports the UN process.[253] Senior Russian officials have met with both LNA and GNA leaders in Moscow, although Russia has prioritized its relationship with Haftar.[254] Its printing of currency for the LNA-allied eastern Libyan administration has prolonged the political split.[255]

Russia also has significant economic interests in Libya. Russia's Rosneft signed a major exploration and production deal with the Libyan National Oil Corporation in early 2017.[256] Russian influence over Libyan oil production may allow Russia to pressure Italy, which has large financial entanglements in Libya.[257] Russia's quest for both cash and influence yielded a rumored $2.9 billion military deal with Haftar.[258] Moscow also seeks to revive or replace tens of billions in revenues from Qaddafi-era deals that have gone unfulfilled since the regime's fall.[259]

Qatar. Qatar invested heavily in the revolution to overthrow Qaddafi. It provided significant materiel support, training, air power, and hundreds of troops.[260] The Qatari patronage network empowered a network of Islamist powerbrokers that continues to shape the Libyan conflict, particularly the LIFG.[261]

Qatar's intervention in Libya is part of a broader effort to support the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists throughout the region. It backed the GNC parliament and the Islamist Libya Dawn alliance in the 2014 civil war. Qatar temporarily reduced its support for Islamist militias in 2015 under pressure from the UN and US, pushing for the formation of the GNA.[262] Qatar now has ties to both pro-GNC and pro-GNA groups.[263] The ongoing Qatar diplomatic crisis in 2017 has likely constrained Qatar's ability to supply Libyan forces. Qatar has also mediated between Libyan tribes.[264]

Turkey. Turkey, like Qatar, desires a pro-Islamist state in Libya. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan supports the Muslim Brotherhood and has taken a pro-Islamist line in several regional conflicts.[265] Turkey has facilitated the delivery of Qatari support to Libyan Islamist factions.[266] It provides financial, medical, and materiel support to Islamist armed groups, possibly including Ansar al Sharia.[267]

Turkey supports the UN-backed GNA[268] but is also aligned with Islamist factions that are working through the GNA to pursue their own interests. Turkey's involvement in Libya is largely defensive of political Islamists under threat by the Egyptian-Emirati axis. Turkey also has ties to Libyan tribes of Ottoman origin.[269] These tribes prioritize their Libyan identity, but Erdogan may see them as part of a broader neo-Ottoman project. Turkish companies also have interests in Libya.[270]

Sudan. Sudan seeks to shape an Islamist state in Libya and deny Sudanese anti-regime rebel groups access to safe havens in Libya. Sudan provided both direct and logistical support for the arming of Libyan Islamist fighters during the 2011 revolution.[271] It also transferred materiel to Libya Dawn in 2014.[272] Sudan opposes the LNA, which works with Sudanese anti-government rebel fighters.[273]

Chad. Chad seeks a stable Libya as a block against Sudanese influence. It also seeks to deny Libyan safe havens to Salafi-jihadi groups and Chadian anti-regime rebel groups, which fight with Misratan forces against the LNA.[274] Chad openly supports the LNA.[275]

Tunisia. Tunisia seeks a stable Libya that provides economic opportunities for Tunisian citizens and does not offer safe havens for Salafi-jihadi groups. The Libya crisis has generated several dire threats to Tunisia, including a series of ISIS attacks that crippled Tunisia's tourism economy in 2015.[276] Libya is the main hub for Tunisian ISIS militants seeking training, traveling to Iraq and Syria, or returning to Tunisia. The increased border security requirement has harmed the income of Tunisians in economically depressed regions who rely on work in Libya and the

cross-border economy.[277] Economic protests are the greatest risk to Tunisia's fledgling democracy.

Tunisia is a conduit for international efforts and a potential mediator for the Libya crisis. It hosts UN operations, US diplomatic staff, international non-governmental organizations, and Libyan CSOs, and potentially a drone base for US operations in Libya.[278] Tunisia joined Egypt and Algeria in a tripartite effort to broker peace in Libya.[279] The leader of Tunisia's leading Islamist party reportedly moderated talks with Libyan Islamists as part of this process.

Algeria. Algeria seeks to stabilize Libya, deny safe havens to Salafi-jihadi groups, and solidify its status as a regional power. Algeria also seeks to counterbalance Egyptian influence in North Africa. It opposes Western intervention beyond limited counterterrorism cooperation. However, Algeria has not dedicated sufficient resources to advance these objectives. Economic problems and an uncertain succession may be constraining Algerian action.[280] Algeria is pursuing a political solution in coordination with Tunisia and Egypt.[281] It has also increased border security to address the uptick in militant and smuggling activity in Libya.[282]

The European Union. EU interests in Libya include countering migration and terrorism and securing economic opportunities. Libya is a primary outlet for African migrants to Europe. The EU's Operation Sophia mission seeks to reduce cross-Mediterranean human trafficking, monitor the training of the Libyan coast guard, and prevent oil smuggling.[283] European states also import the bulk of Libya's crude oil.[284]

EU members have shared objectives but are not pursuing synchronized lines of effort.

Italy has major economic interests and is most affected by refugee flows from its former colony. Italy's deep ties to Libyan institutions give it leverage, but its colonial past raises the risk of backlash in the event of overreach. Italy has invested heavily in the UN-backed GNA. It reopened its embassy in Tripoli in January 2017.[285] Italy has a significant intelligence and special operations footprint in Libya.[286] Italian special operators assist the GNA in Tripoli and Misrata,

including securing the GNA's base in Tripoli.[287] Italy pursues an aggressive policy to curb migration from Libya that includes compensation for militias and may expand to include Italian naval interdictions in Libyan territorial waters.[288]

France seeks to stabilize Libya to counter terrorism and migration. French President Emmanuel Macron is positioning himself as a peace broker for Libya, alongside a broader effort to reinvigorate French leadership in northern Africa.[289] This effort is one of several French initiatives outside the UN process. France has also provided direct counterterrorism support to the LNA.[290] France has a separate counterterrorism mission for direct action against AQIM leadership based in southwestern Libya and the Sahel region.[291]

The UK's primary interest in Libya is countering terrorism. It has provided diplomatic and security assistance to Libya.[292] British diplomats actively support the UN process.[293] British forces participate in the EU naval mission, and small teams of special operators have provided counterterrorism support against Salafi-jihadi groups in Sirte and Benghazi.[294]

Germany took a measured stance on the Libya conflict but is preparing to provide assistance. It seeks to counter migration by supporting the GNA.[295] Germany offered to train the GNA's incipient presidential guard[296] and has promised infrastructure support.[297] Germany's involvement in Libya reflects both its leadership in Europe and a broader effort to increase German investment in Africa.[298]

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Appendix B. The Libyan Salafi-Jihadi Base: A Center of Gravity Analysis

American operations against Salafi-jihadi organizations in Libya have had only temporary effects. The US has focused primarily on conducting direct-action operations against high-value individuals in Libya and partnering with local forces to retake territory from Salafi-jihadi groups, most recently from ISIS. These operations have targeted only a small part of the Salafi-jihadi base inside Libya. The US has tried to parse organizations and networks into transnational components, which should be targeted, and local ones, which should not. This approach is based on the false assumptions that the groups function in such a fashion that the transnational cells can be defeated without defeating the larger organization and that the organization will not organically regenerate destroyed transnational cells. Both assumptions are incorrect. They also ignore the resiliency that the broader Salafi-jihadi base provides to both al Qaeda and ISIS. Continuing this approach to counterterrorism operations will fail.

The fighting between al Qaeda and ISIS in Syria has skewed analysis of the way the groups interact outside that theater generally and in North Africa particularly. Libyan al Qaeda and ISIS groups are not in direct conflict in Libya and do not prioritize intergroup competition on anything like the level observed in Syria and Iraq.[1] Their near-term objectives align, and both benefit from preventing the formation of a strong Libyan state. Their human networks overlap, and they will even cooperate against common enemies when under pressure.[2] The two groups clash only when competing for control of populations.[3] Libyan ISIS militants retain their prior ties to the al Qaeda network and may reaffiliate if ISIS in Libya dissolves, bringing with them new capabilities. Constraining US efforts in Libya to focus primarily on ISIS misses the much greater danger of the burgeoning Salafi-jihadi movement there.

An effective strategy in Libya must address the entire Salafi-jihadi base there. The Libyan branches of al Qaeda and ISIS are part of this picture, but not the whole. Group membership throughout the Salafi-jihadi movement is generally fixed only at the leadership level, with far more group-allegiance flexibility among foot soldiers. The analysis below identifies the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base's critical capabilities, critical requirements, critical vulnerabilities, and centers of gravity.[4] It serves as the basis for the developed approach to eliminating the Salafi-jihadi threat from Libya.

The Libyan Salafi-Jihadi Base

The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base is the network of individuals, groups, and organizations that seek to establish an Islamic polity under *shari'a*-based governance through the use of force.[5] The base includes members whose objectives are local: to transform the Libyan state. However, their ideology is inherently global in its objectives, and transnational groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS rely on support from the local base.

The Salafi-jihadi base has existed in Libya for decades. It was unable to generate significant popular support until the 2011 revolution. Rather, the base was isolated and marginalized. A cadre of Libyans traveled to Afghanistan in the early and mid-1980s, answering Abdullah al Azzam's call to jihad and seizing an opportunity to train in Osama bin Laden's military camps.[6] Their initial effort to organize in the 1980s failed after the Libyan regime uncovered a plot to overthrow Muammar al Qaddafi and arrested some of those involved.[7] Those who avoided arrest later helped to form the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a Salafi-jihadi group with connections to al Qaeda that the regime also neutralized. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base remained marginalized throughout the 2000s. Qaddafi's son Saif al Islam led mediation that produced the LIFG's renunciation of violent jihad in 2009 and the release of some of the group's imprisoned leadership.[8]

The Salafi-jihadi base expanded and strengthened during the 2011 revolution and its immediate aftermath. Revolutionaries opened Qaddafi's jails, releasing a second cadre of Islamist militants that included more LIFG leaders.[9] Al Qaeda deployed senior Libyan leader Abu Anas al Libi to form a Libyan affiliate in 2011.[10] This al Qaeda and LIFG human network supported the formation of Ansar al Sharia brigades in Benghazi and Derna.[11] These groups did not play a significant role in toppling Qaddafi, but positioned themselves to inherit revolutionary credibility. They gained popular acceptance by providing governance after the state collapsed.[12] Ansar al Sharia formed the core of a Libyan Salafi-jihadi base,[13] which includes a broader network of like-minded individuals, militias, and shura councils[14] operating throughout Libya.

The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base gained influence with the outbreak of civil war in 2014. Islamist militias, including Ansar al Sharia, vied with transitional authorities for control of Benghazi.[15] Libyan National Army (LNA) commander Khalifa Haftar launched a military campaign to counter Islamist militias in mid-2014.[16] The militias consolidated in response to this campaign. Ansar al Sharia brigades merged with more moderate Islamist groups to form coalitions in Benghazi and Derna.[17] Salafi-jihadi leaders hold key positions in these coalitions, which relied on the military leadership and asymmetric capabilities that trained Salafi-jihadi militants could provide. The Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council, which included Ansar al Sharia, temporarily accomplished Ansar al Sharia's objective by declaring an Islamic emirate in Benghazi in 2014.[18]

The entry of ISIS into Libya in 2014 first fractured but then expanded the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base. ISIS established its first branch in Derna, co-opting a small group.[19] The Ansar al Sharia–linked coalition in Derna later ousted ISIS from the city. ISIS then seized the city of Sirte, in part by co-opting the local Ansar al Sharia network, and governed it for more than a year. ISIS's brutality and perceived foreignness made Ansar al Sharia and similarly al Qaeda–aligned groups more palatable to local populations.[20]

The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base benefits from the fragmentation of religious authority in Libya. The country's traditional religious authorities, long co-opted by the regime, were weakened further as Islamist and Salafi militias that formed during the revolution and its aftermath became an alternate source of religious authority. Elements of this religious authority, including the former head of a religious ruling body and associated militias, have become aligned with—although not yet a part of—the Salafi-jihadi base.[21] The Salafi-jihadi base also draws support from conservative communities with longtime ties to the Afghan and Iraqi jihads.[22] Salafi-jihadi actors have not fully co-opted these religious and tribal networks, but they benefit from local facilitation in select communities.

Libyan and international military operations have weakened the Salafi-jihadi base since 2014 but not destroyed it. The base remains capable of exploiting vulnerable populations and operating freely in parts of Libya. Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi formally dissolved in response to the LNA's takeover of the city in May 2017.[23] The Ansar al Sharia human network persists, and militants are active in safe havens to Libya's center and south.[24] An Ansar al Sharia–linked coalition has thwarted the LNA's efforts to capture Derna city. A renewed insurgency in Benghazi is likely in the medium term. ISIS suffered a similar major military loss in Sirte in late 2016. It regrouped in remote areas and is now reactivating both ground forces and covert cells to reestablish a presence on the Libyan coast. The return of ISIS indicates the resilience of the Salafi-jihadi base in conditions of persistent instability and conflict.

The Salafi-Jihadi Base's Elements of Strategic Power

Groups within the Salafi-jihadi base largely draw on the same elements of strategic power for their strengths. Divergences between al Qaeda and ISIS are few (see Table B1).

The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base is itself an element of strategic power for the global Salafi-jihadi movement. Destroying the Libyan base or some of its elements would therefore have second-order effects on the broader movement.

Table B1. ISIS and al Qaeda in Libya: More Friend Than Foe

A Shared Opportunity	ISIS and al Qaeda benefit from the same conditions: an aggrieved population, civil conflict, and the breakdown of the Libyan state.
Cooperation and Shared Goals	Al Qaeda and ISIS are both components of the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base. They share: • A long-term goal (establishing an Islamic polity) and • An overlapping human network. They cooperate by: • Deconflicting in safe havens and transit zones and • Fighting common enemies when under pressure.
Conflict and Competition	Al Qaeda and ISIS are competitors with strategic and ideological differences. They compete by: • Fighting for control of populations and • Conducting counter-messaging and propaganda campaigns.

Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

Center of Gravity. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base draws its strength from its connection to aggrieved local populations.[25] Gaining popular tolerance or support is the biggest hurdle on the path to the Salafi-jihadi end state. The mobilization of the Libyan population during the revolution and later conflicts created an opportunity for the Salafi-jihadi base to hijack the local insurgencies and begin to transform them in its image. The relationship with the population—either willing or coerced—also gives Salafi-jihadi groups access to key requirements for survival that include a recruitment pool, funding, and facilitation networks.

Al Qaeda–affiliated groups in Libya connect themselves to this mobilized population by positioning themselves as revolutionaries and defenders of communities. This strategy reflects al Qaeda's overall strategy of becoming a "vanguard" that enables local organizations to bring about an Islamic revolution across the Muslim world.[26] Libyan al Qaeda associates draw on the resonant themes of revolution to align themselves with—and become—locally legitimate

actors. They build ties by providing what the population requires—military capabilities, humanitarian aid, and basic governance—and by partnering with local armed groups. They are on the ground and responsive to local dynamics.

ISIS exploits grievances and societal rifts to subjugate populations to its will.[27] Its strategy is more overt and less insidious than that of al Qaeda, which builds more enduring ties to local groups. ISIS's strategy reflects its effort to establish an Islamic state in the present rather than to set conditions for doing so in the future, which is al Qaeda's current approach.[28] ISIS has succeeded in operating within populations that are fragmented by tribal or other factional conflict. For example, it seized Sirte by exploiting societal rifts and moving into the seam between Libya's two main military blocs. ISIS's return to the Libyan coast reflects the persistence of these seams in Libyan society.[29]

Removing the connection between the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base and the population would push the Salafi-jihadi movement back to the margins of society.

Table B2. The Libyan Salafi-Jihadi Base: Elements of Strategic Power

	Definition	Elements
Center of Gravity	"The source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act"	• Connection to an aggrieved population
Critical Capabilities	"A means that is considered a crucial enabler for a center of gravity to function as such and is essential to the accomplishment of the specified or assumed objective(s)"	• Reputation and narrative • Effective warfighting • Ability to provide governance, aid, or economic benefits • Operational relationships with local armed groups • External attack node
Critical Requirements	"An essential condition, resource, and means for a critical capability to be fully operational"	• Popular grievances and/or shared short-term objectives with local groups • Security and governance vacuums • Recruiting and training • Media • Funding and materiel • Bomb making and military planning expertise • Local collaborators
Critical Vulnerabilities	"An aspect of a critical requirement that is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects"	• Presence of popular grievances and/or civil conflict • Presence of security and governance vacuums • Access to resources

Source: US Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, August 2017, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/ new_pubs/dictionary.pdf; and author's analysis.

The base would lose access to ready funding and resources, recruits, and the local partners that give it cover and a forum to spread its ideology. Isolating the base would also remove the core source of resiliency for the transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations that attack the West (see Table B2).

Critical Capabilities. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base gained some capabilities from regional and global Salafi-jihadi networks in 2011 and 2012 but now generates and supports its core capabilities internally.

Reputation and Narrative. Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya cultivate reputations and narratives that foster popular acceptance and encourage recruitment. Ansar al Sharia and related groups leverage their revolutionary

credentials to partner with local armed groups and draw support from populations that see a counter-revolution as an existential threat. ISIS in Libya relies on the notoriety of the global ISIS brand and the narrative of the expanding caliphate to draw local and foreign recruits. The effectiveness of this branding is critical because al Qaeda and ISIS lack support from prominent Libyan religious leaders. Al Qaeda's religious credentials come instead from the piety of its members as perceived and valued by Libya's conservative society.

Effective Warfighting. Salafi-jihadi groups require military capabilities sufficient either to help protect or to seize control of communities. These capabilities allow Salafi-jihadi groups to achieve their

own military objectives and to provide asymmetric advantages to local insurgencies. They include technical capabilities such as bomb making and strategic capabilities such as the planning and execution of complex military campaigns.[30] Effective war–fighting also reinforces a reputation of success for the Salafi-jihadi base that supports recruitment and relationship building with communities.

Ability to Provide Governance, Aid, or Economic Benefits. The Salafi-jihadi base provide benefits to populations in order to forge enduring ties. Salafi-jihadi groups replace failing states by providing humanitarian aid, education programs, and basic governance.[31] Effective governance is crucial in cases where Salafi-jihadi groups control a population and seek to become a viable state.[32]

Operational Relationships with Local Armed Groups. Salafi-jihadi groups require battlefield relationships with local forces in order to develop relationships with communities. These coalitions mask ties to transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations while providing an opportunity to spread Salafi-jihadi ideology through local governance and joint military campaigns. Participation in coalitions is also a survival mechanism for Salafi-jihadi groups engaged in defensive campaigns. Al Qaeda associates have stronger operational relationships than ISIS in Libya due to their broader human network and greater willingness to work with nonideologically aligned groups.[33]

External Attack Node. Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya have the capability to facilitate attacks in Europe remotely or through direct training and transit.[34] The external attack node is not required to maintain the connection between the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base and the population. However, the ability to generate attacks in Europe from regional safe havens is a critical capability for the global Salafi-jihadi movement.

Critical Requirements. The critical requirements for the Salafi-jihadi base include both conditions exogenous to the groups and required capabilities and resources.

Popular Grievances and/or Shared Short-Term Objectives with Local Groups. A Salafi-jihadi base cannot become strong in a fully functioning society. It insinuates itself amid conflict, polarization, and instability. These conditions in Libya have pushed more moderate actors to fund or fight alongside extremist groups, normalizing elements of the Salafi-jihadi base in the process.[35] Grievances and the need to prioritize self-defense also prevent populations from banding together against Salafi-jihadi groups that they would oppose in the absence of internecine conflict.[36]

Security and Governance Vacuums. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base requires access to permissive terrain or safe havens to carry out key functions. Access to permissive terrain increases the resilience of Salafi-jihadi military organizations, which exploit security vacuums to host training camps or to retreat and regroup after setbacks. Salafi-jihadi groups also use rear areas to stage attacks on vulnerable commercial and infrastructure targets than have an outsized effect on Libya's stability.

Libyan safe havens also support critical capabilities for transnational Salafi-jihadi groups. The country is a training and recruitment site for the Syrian jihad and a transit, training, and staging zone for attacks in the Maghreb, Sahel, and Europe. Regional Salafi-jihadi groups also operate in the Libyan security vacuum, accessing illicit economic networks and developing pragmatic ties to ethnic groups.[37]

Recruiting and Training. Salafi-jihadi groups require insurgent fighters. The al Qaeda network recruits Maghrebi militants to fight in Libya or train in Libya for the Syrian jihad. ISIS in Libya recruits across the Maghreb and into Sub-Saharan Africa for its Libyan branch.[38] It also attracts or hosts Western fighters that serve as an attack vector to Europe.[39] This requirement rests on both Libya's porous borders and its security vacuum, which facilitate broad recruitment and relatively unimpeded training camps.

Media. Salafi-jihadi groups require media capabilities to reach out to populations and coordinate the broader Salafi-jihadi base. Ansar al Sharia and

affiliated groups use media to defend their reputations and emphasize common grievances with Libyan communities as well as to issue guidance to members of the Salafi-jihadi base.[40] ISIS propaganda has both amplified the group's narrative of global expansion[41] and attempted to take up resonant Libyan narratives.[42] ISIS media from Libya also courted recruits from Sub-Saharan Africa.[43]

Funding and Materiel. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base draws resources from multiple sources. They are necessary to support military capabilities and fighters, as well as to provide services to populations. Initial funding from transnational Salafi-jihadi organizations assisted in the formation of both Ansar al Sharia and ISIS in Libya, but both groups have transitioned to independent funding.[44] Funding sources for the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base include local tax bases, checkpoints, smuggling and trafficking, local sponsorship, philanthropy, state salaries,[45] and foreign support accessed through partnerships and local facilitators. Small arms are generally accessible throughout Libya. More advanced weaponry from Qaddafi's arsenal also flowed to Salafi-jihadi groups.[46]

Bomb Making and Military Planning Expertise. Salafi-jihadi groups build functional partnerships with other insurgent forces by providing needed military capabilities. They provide asymmetric capabilities, such as suicide bombers, that draw out fights against conventional forces. Trained Salafi-jihadi militants also provide operational planning expertise that local forces lack.

Local Collaborators. The base requires facilitators and enablers to access resources and sustain basic operations. Family and tribal networks serve this purpose in places where the base is deeply rooted.[47] Collaborators may also come from marginalized sectors of society that facilitate Salafi-jihadi activity for economic survival or physical protection.[48] These ties also help Salafi-jihadi groups access the state salaries that bankroll Libya's militias.[49]

Critical Vulnerabilities. Critical vulnerabilities are critical requirements that can be attacked to cause second-order effects.

Presence of Popular Grievances and/or Civil Conflict. Resolving grievances and conflict frees the population from requiring, or being unable to resist, Salafi-jihadi groups. Resolving these conditions collapses popular support for the Salafi-jihadi base. It drains the resources from the base and incentivizes the population to isolate and expel Salafi-jihadi actors, returning them to the margins of society.

Presence of Security and Governance Vacuums. Eliminating vacuums denies the Salafi-jihadi base the time and space to conduct a broad range of activities, including training, attack planning, financing, and coordination. Removing vacuums erodes the resiliency of the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base and degrades the base's critical capabilities in Africa and globally.

Access to Resources. The Libyan Salafi-jihadi base requires funding to maintain its military capabilities and personnel and to provide services to populations. The main sources of funding are the illicit economy and local allies and facilitators, through which the base draws on state salaries and external funding.

Analysis: The al Qaeda Network in Libya

Al Qaeda poses a quiet but dangerous long-term threat in Libya.

Background and State of Play. Al Qaeda's strategy relies on localized associates to cultivate popular support for the group's ideology over time. These groups gain support by finding common cause with local forces and providing public services, including governance, to populations.

Al Qaeda capitalized on the breakdown of the Libyan state and mobilization of the population during the 2011 revolution. It invested in the development of Ansar al Sharia through the former LIFG network[50] and established new training camps in Libyan safe

Figure B1. Al Qaeda Network Graphic
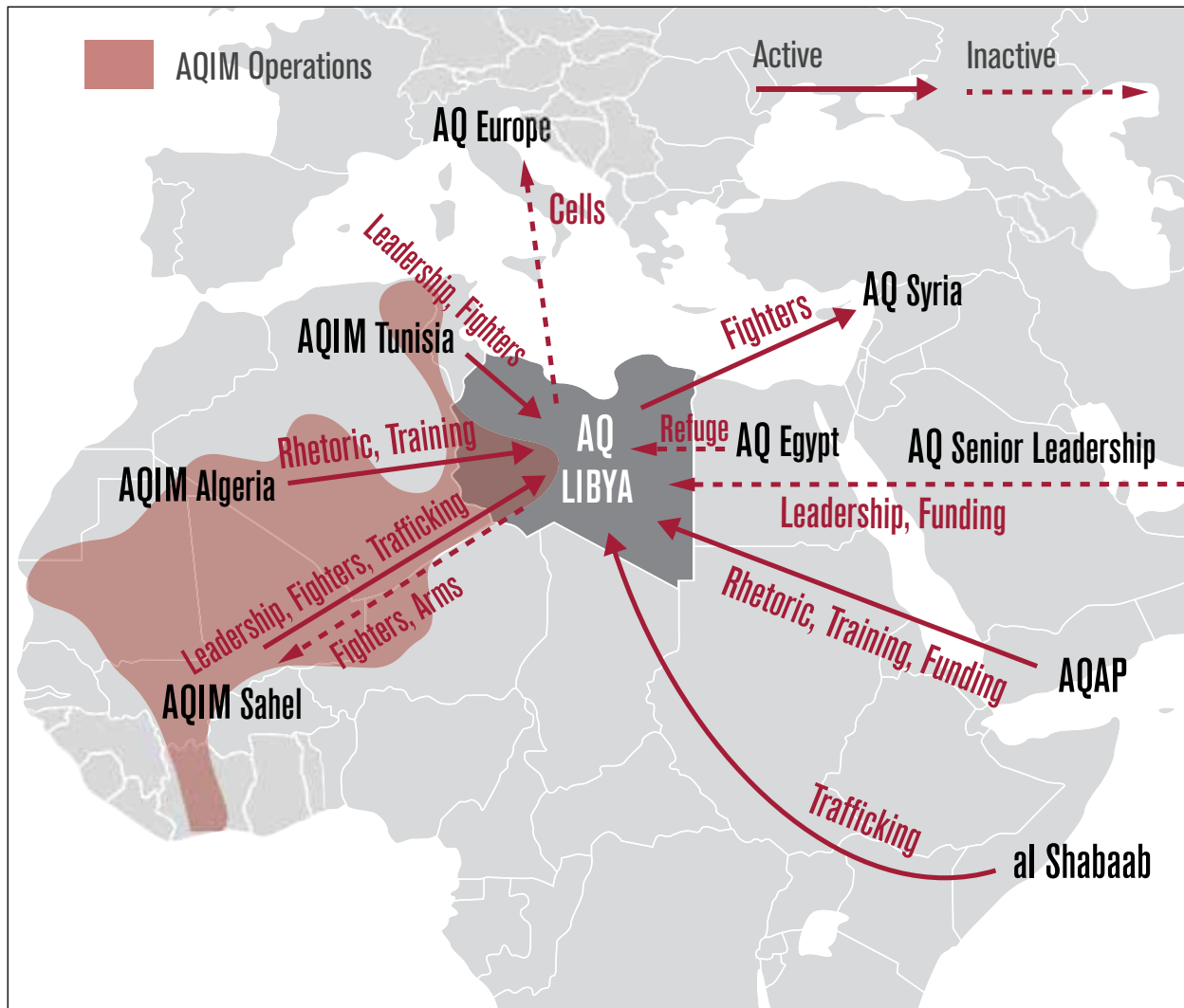
Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

havens.[51] Ansar al Sharia, which never used al Qaeda's name,[52] built local legitimacy and spread al Qaeda's ideology by providing military capabilities and social services alongside *da'wa* (preaching).

Al Qaeda's regional affiliates are a guiding hand for the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leadership has cultivated the Salafi-jihadi human network in Libya.[53] It has likely coordinated operations and supply lines for Ansar al Sharia and associated groups in northeastern Libya. AQIM has also deployed fighters to support

Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi.[54] Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has also supported the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base with rhetoric, funding, and trained fighters (see Figure B1).[55]

The two main Ansar al Sharia branches—in Benghazi and Derna—are connected but operate separately. Both cast themselves as vanguards of the Libyan revolution and gained acceptance by providing military capabilities to groups that shared a common enemy. They seek to establish an Islamic emirate in Libya by co-opting local militia coalitions and

Table B3. Al Qaeda's Objectives in Libya

Grand Strategic Objectives	• Unify the global Salafi-jihadi movement under al Qaeda's leadership. • Expel the West and Russia from Muslim lands. • Transform Muslim societies to establish Islamic polities that reflect al Qaeda's ideology.

Strategic Objectives
Operational Objectives
	Establish a polity governed by *shari'a* law in Libya.
	   • *Capture popular support or tolerance.*
	   • *Prevent the reconstitution of a sovereign Libyan state.*

	Remove Western presence from Libya.
	Contest the rise of ISIS and unite the Libyan Salafi-jihadi movement. • *Incorporate ISIS defectors.*
	Preserve and expand the Libyan safe haven in support of global operations.

Sources: AEI's Critical Threats Project; Institute for the Study of War; and author's synthesis.

governance structures. Ansar al Sharia leaders hold key positions in these coalitions without ostensibly leading them.[56]

Ansar al Sharia Benghazi, later rebranded as Ansar al Sharia Libya, is the larger branch[57] and has played a key role as a governance source and insurgent force in Benghazi since 2011. The group is most known for its connection to the 2012 attack on US diplomatic sites in Benghazi. It is also a component of the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), an Islamist militant coalition that declared an Islamic emirate in Benghazi in 2014. The BRSC is a key force multiplier and source of resilience for Ansar al Sharia. Ansar al Sharia Benghazi officially dissolved in May 2017, citing leadership attrition.[58] The BRSC remains active, however, and continues to pursue Ansar al Sharia's objectives.

Ansar al Sharia solidified its position in Derna by fighting common enemies. It is part of the Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna (MSCD), which governs the city. The MSCD ousted ISIS from Derna city in June 2015.[59] The MSCD is defending Derna city from a LNA siege, further cementing its ties to the embattled population.

Al Qaeda's Libyan Haven. Al Qaeda uses Libyan terrain to advance multiple strategic priorities, including campaigns in other theaters (see Table B3). Al Qaeda affiliates recruit and train in Libya in support of the Syrian jihad, al Qaeda's priority front. AQIM and Ansar al Sharia Tunisia administer training camps in Libya that send fighters to al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria.[60] This training also supports al Qaeda's fight against North African regimes. The group intends for North African fighters to return battle-hardened from Syria to continue the fight at home.[61]

AQIM uses its haven in southwestern Libya as a base for coordinating regional operations, including the insurgency in Mali. AQIM accesses this terrain in part by infiltrating Tuareg networks, which connect Mali to southern Algeria and Libya. AQIM benefits from lucrative smuggling and trafficking routes in southern Libya.[62] AQIM and Ansar al Sharia Tunisia, a group with ties to both AQIM and ISIS, base leadership in Libya.[63] Libya has also served as a refuge for Egyptian al Qaeda cells fleeing Egyptian crackdowns and competition with ISIS in Sinai.[64]

Concept of Operations. The Ansar al Sharia concept of operations is designed to capture the support of the Libyan population through both kinetic and nonkinetic means. Ansar al Sharia conducted *da'wa*, *hisbah* (religious policing), media, and humanitarian operations to build local support.[65] It developed ties to other armed groups by becoming a comrade in arms against the Qaddafi regime and later the LNA. This coalition building included nonideologically aligned groups, including militias affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood,[66] in support of al Qaeda's overarching objective of uniting the *umma*. Ansar al Sharia delivers key capabilities to these coalitions that include military expertise and asymmetric attacks, notably assassination campaigns and bombings targeting mutual enemies.[67] Ansar al Sharia's success in postrevolution Benghazi was based on its ability to offer necessary services—such as governance, aid, weapons, and military capabilities—not the appeal of its desired end state. It introduced *shari'a* governance gradually before declaring an emirate,[68] although this declaration was likely still too premature to succeed in a contested Benghazi.

The al Qaeda Human Network in Libya. Al Qaeda benefits from a Salafi-jihadi human network in Libya that is unified in pursuit of a common goal but lacks organizational ties to al Qaeda itself. This network is a means for the Salafi-jihadi base to influence and transform Libyan Islamist and revolutionary groups. It serves al Qaeda's overarching goal of unifying the ranks of jihad and is capable of coordinating multifront operations against a common entity and sharing mutually beneficial safe havens.

Like-minded groups publicly distance themselves from the al Qaeda brand as a matter of strategy. Al Qaeda has adopted this strategy in other theaters, notably Syria, to avoid popular backlash and Western policy attention.[69] The official dissolution of Ansar al Sharia may be similarly intended to preserve operatives' connections to local populations, which were jeopardized[70] by their institutional affiliation. Al Qaeda affiliates have demonstrated support for this localization of the Salafi-jihadi vanguard by promoting Libyan groups that have denied any relationship to al Qaeda.[71]

The al Qaeda human network contains coalitions that include Ansar al Sharia, as well as smaller shura councils with known leadership ties to al Qaeda affiliates.[72] These groups include the BRSC, the MSCD, the Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council, and the al Hasawna Shura Council. It also includes more ideologically diverse groups that advance al Qaeda's objectives but do not always follow its guidance, notably the Benghazi Defense Brigades.[73] These groups include factions that do not self-identify as Salafi-jihadi. They are effectively part of the Salafi-jihadi base, however, because they use force to pursue an Islamic polity and follow religious leadership that has expressed support for Salafi-jihadi ideology.

Military Capabilities. Ansar al Sharia and affiliated groups have both offensive and defensive military capabilities. LNA operations weakened Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi and Derna in 2017, but the persistence of safe havens in central Libya will allow them to reconstitute and resume insurgent campaigns.

Ansar al Sharia can defend urban terrain from conventional military power using both conventional and asymmetric means. The Benghazi and Derna branches have demonstrated artillery and antiaircraft capabilities.[74] Ansar al Sharia in Derna is capable of operational-level campaign design. Ansar al Sharia Benghazi lost planning capabilities due to leadership attrition,[75] but strategic thinking persists in related groups such as the BRSC and the Benghazi Defense Brigades.

Ansar al Sharia and related groups draw military strength from the Libyan security vacuum and their local ties. They can generate forces from permissive support zones[76] in the central Libyan desert to support attacks on oil sites and population centers to the northeast. Ansar al Sharia has significant intelligence and counterintelligence capabilities due to its military, tribal, and familial ties.

The al Qaeda human network retains Ansar al Sharia's asymmetric capabilities, including bomb making. The Benghazi branch can manufacture and deploy vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs).[77] Ansar al Sharia in Derna has attempted

Table B4. ISIS's Objectives in Libya

Grand Strategic Objectives	• Expand the caliphate to encompass all Muslim lands. • Provoke and win an apocalyptic war with the West. • Assert unchallenged authority as a caliphate.
Strategic Objectives *Operational Objectives*	Reestablish the territorial caliphate in Libya. • *Reconstitute fighting force and command structure.* • *Preserve safe haven in Libya.*
	Break regional states or prevent their reconstitution. • *Prevent the reconstitution of a sovereign Libyan state.* • *Destabilize Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt.*
	Remove Western presence from Libya.
	Command the Libyan Salafi-jihadi movement. • *Co-opt or supersede al Qaeda networks.*

Source: Katherine Zimmerman, Jennifer Cafarella, and Harleen Gambhir, *Jabhat al Nusra and ISIS: Sources of Strength,* AEI's Critical Threats Project and Institute for the Study of War, February 11, 2016, 12, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/jabhat-al-nusra-and-isis-sources-of-strength; and author's synthesis.

to supplement its conventional defense of Derna city with explosive attacks against LNA targets.[78]

Media. The primary audience for Ansar al Sharia's media is the Libyan people. Its secondary audience is the international community. Both Ansar al Sharia branches rely on local militia coalitions to publish locally focused media. These coalitions deliberately distance themselves from al Qaeda in the media, and recent propaganda has focused on deflecting criticism and denying accusations of terrorism.[79] Ansar al Sharia media is in line with al Qaeda's global messaging and goals.

Ansar al Sharia messaging appeals to anti-Qaddafi and anti-Western sentiment. The group draws strength from its role in the revolution and continued fight against factions perceived as counterrevolutionary. Its messaging has emphasized this role over its ideology, which is less popular. Ansar al Sharia has broadcast its accomplishments to court popular support as well as promote al Qaeda ideologues.[80]

Al Qaeda affiliates amplify Ansar al Sharia's message by presenting Benghazi as a frontline in al Qaeda's global jihad.[81] These statements are intended to bolster recruitment for the Libyan fight as well as reinforce al Qaeda's global reach.

Financing. Ansar al Sharia's financing relies on the conflict economy and local sponsors. Its finances are likely robust enough to withstand the loss of key terrain in the near term, although the loss of access to Benghazi populations will have significant effects. The conflict economy benefits militia leaders, who have amassed fortunes through interconnected business interests and illicit economic activities.[82] State funding for militias reaches Ansar al Sharia through its partnerships with revolutionary militias. Ansar al Sharia also relies on local sponsors and nationwide philanthropic networks. Recent backlash against Ansar al Sharia–linked groups from Misrata[83] may limit this flow of support from western Libya. The MSCD, which includes Ansar al Sharia, controls and taxes the population in Derna city. Ansar al Sharia likely receives indirect support from Turkey, Qatar, and Sudan, which fund Islamist militias and Muslim Brotherhood–aligned groups with which the Ansar al Sharia network cooperates.[84] Checkpoints are also a source of income for Libyan militias and Salafi-jihadi groups.

Analysis: ISIS in Libya

The conditions of the Libyan civil war allowed ISIS to establish a foothold despite nearly universal opposition among Libyans to its ideology and tactics.

Background and State of Play. ISIS imposed its will on vulnerable communities and forged pragmatic relationships with populations marginalized by the postrevolution social order. ISIS incurred significant backlash only when it encroached too far[85] or became a danger[86] to the communities in which it operated.

ISIS spread to multiple Libyan cities after its initial deployment of envoys to cultivate support in Libya in 2013. It drew from the preexisting al Qaeda in Iraq pipeline[87] to eastern Libya and a new recruiting pool energized by its claim to reestablish an Islamic caliphate. ISIS developed an initial stronghold in Derna in 2014, but preexisting al Qaeda–linked groups drove the group out of the city the following year. ISIS later co-opted the Ansar al Sharia network in Sirte. It exploited seams in the Libyan civil war to take over the city in early 2015. ISIS fighters also seized neighborhoods in Benghazi in 2015 and 2016.[88] ISIS conducted a series of mutually reinforcing campaigns that included spectacular attacks intended to inspire recruitment and assaults on infrastructure meant to prevent the formation of a functioning Libyan state (see Table B4).[89]

The establishment of three ISIS *wilayat* in Libya marked a crucial expansion of ISIS's caliphate outside Iraq and Syria. ISIS propaganda elevated Sirte alongside the group's main capitals of Raqqa and Mosul,[90] and senior ISIS officials visited the Libyan city.[91] ISIS in Libya is weakened but resurging. A coalition of Libya forces, backed by US air power, waged a grueling campaign to oust ISIS from Sirte city in late 2016. ISIS retreated to remote areas in Libya's center and south to preserve forces. The group is now establishing a new base in central Libya, from which it has already begun an attack campaign[92] to undermine security and rehabilitate its image as a destination for foreign fighters.

The Libyan Hub. ISIS in Libya is a key node in the global ISIS network. It is independent from but closely related to the Syrian and Iraqi theater. ISIS has encouraged migration to Libya as an alternative to Iraq and Syria.[93] ISIS cannot be defeated as long as it retains a base in Libya, which is the most likely destination for leadership and fighters that flee military loses in Iraq and Syria.

Libya is a support zone for ISIS's attack networks in Europe and Africa. The loss of Sirte did not eliminate ISIS in Libya's capability to facilitate and likely coordinate attacks in European cities.[94] ISIS units based in Libya provide training and guidance to affiliated groups and individuals in Tunisia, Algeria, and possibly Morocco and Nigeria.[95] Libya-based ISIS leadership and fighters are responsible for the series of attacks that crippled the Tunisian tourism economy in 2015. ISIS's African recruitment routes lead to Libya, which is also a transit zone for militants traveling between the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe.[96] ISIS in Libya helped establish ISIS's *wilayah* in the Sinai (see Figure B2).

Concept of Operations. ISIS's concept of operations relies on the fragmentation of the Libyan security environment. ISIS operates in the seams between Libya's rival militia coalitions, which prioritize their political objectives over pursuing the defeat of ISIS in noncritical terrain. These conditions facilitated ISIS's takeover of Sirte, which falls in a seam between Libya's eastern and western power centers.[97] ISIS also built de facto partnerships with Libyan tribes and communities that were marginalized and persecuted for supporting the Qaddafi regime in the 2011 revolution.[98] These tribes do not subscribe to ISIS's ideology but facilitate its movement and economic activity. Libyans perceive ISIS as a foreign organization due to both its totalitarian ideology and the significant presence of non-Libyan fighters in its ranks. Libya's chaos mitigated the effects of these shortcomings.

ISIS used a model of exploiting, consolidating, and governing to take over Sirte. It exploited security seams to enter the city, where it co-opted preexisting Salafi-jihadi networks. It seized uncontested or lightly contested populated terrain in order to co-opt or

Figure B2. ISIS Network Graphic
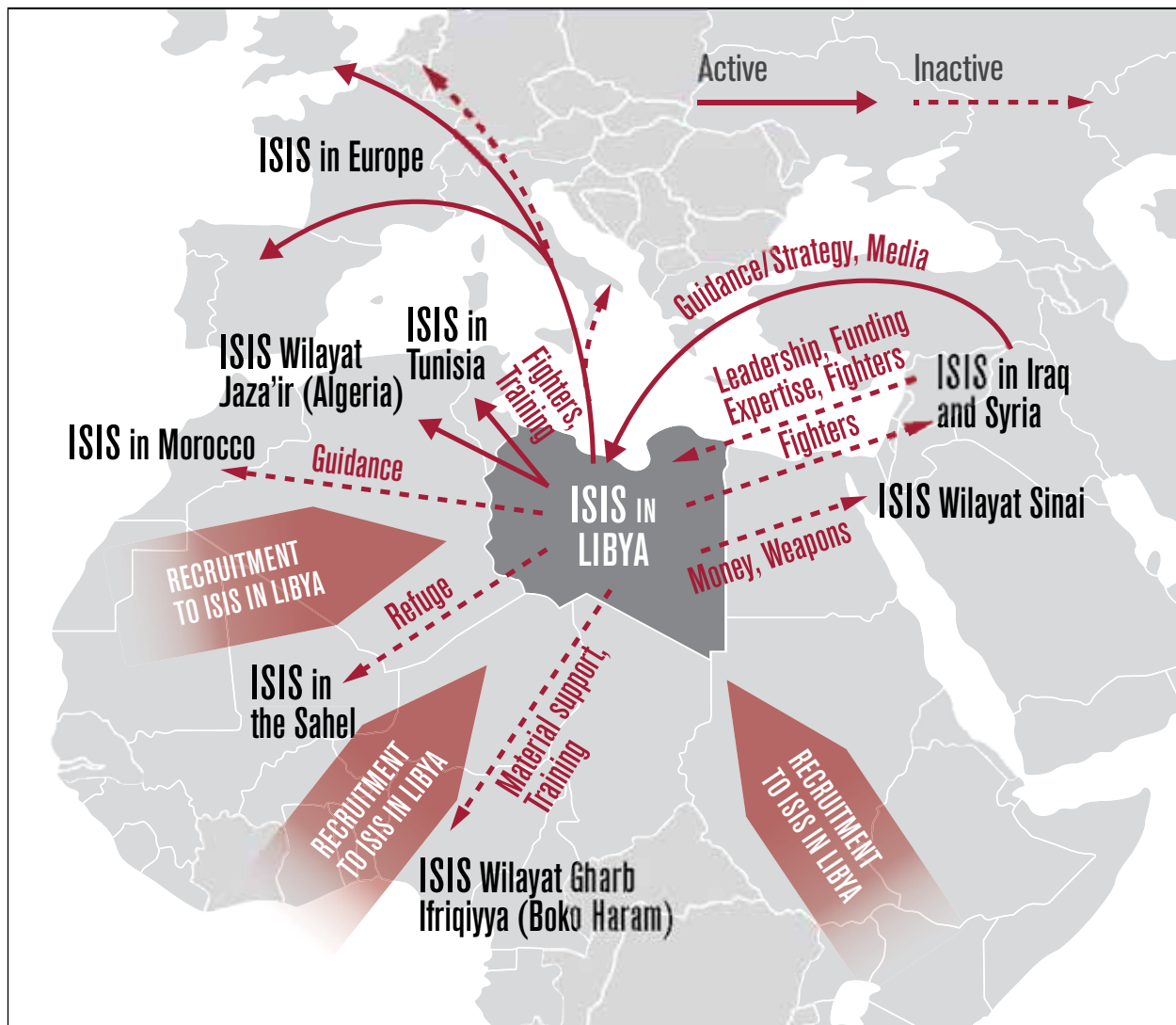
Source: AEI's Critical Threats Project.

coerce populations. ISIS then consolidated control by eliminating or co-opting opposition.[99] It developed governance structures before instituting full control over the population.[100] This effort culminated in the establishment of a "caliphate" polity. This polity then supported secondary efforts, such as additional territorial expansion, a campaign to disrupt oil production,[101] and regional operations in support of foreign fighter flows and ISIS's global expansion. ISIS may attempt to follow this model if it regains sufficient strength in Libya.

ISIS relied on permissive terrain and local facilitation networks[102] to reconstitute after losing Sirte in late 2016. It preserved manpower and capabilities by conducting tactical withdrawals, safeguarded by explosive attacks and booby traps, when faced with overwhelming force.[103] ISIS then leveraged security vacuums and existing relationships to retreat into safe havens. It may have also cooperated with pre-existing Salafi-jihadi networks to access new havens to the south.[104] ISIS then reset with captured resources, including raided supplies and vehicles. It

also established training camps to receive recruits and rebuild manpower. US airstrikes hindered but did not forestall the group's reconstitution.[105] ISIS had to reestablish mid-level leadership to compensate for losses in Sirte. Some upper-level leadership likely remains intact. ISIS also safeguarded its haven by conducting intermittent attacks to deny competing factions access to water and resources.[106] It also disrupted supply lines and transit routes used by its adversaries.[107] ISIS simultaneously maintained sleeper cells in population centers, which it may be activating for a retaliatory attack campaign.[108]

Organization and Leadership. ISIS in Libya formed as three distinct but interrelated *wilayat* correlated with Libya's historical regions: Barqah (Cyrenaica) in the east, Tarablus (Tripoli) in the northwest, and Fezzan in the southwest. The formal divisions between the wilayat likely broke down after ISIS withdrew from Benghazi and Sirte. The group has since reformed as "desert brigades" operating in the central Libyan desert.[109] ISIS also has sleeper cells in Libyan cities. Militants may be returning to the northwestern Libyan border, from which it has facilitated attacks on Tunisia in the past.[110] ISIS leadership deployed Katibat al Battar, a veteran unit, to Libya to support the formation of Libyan *wilayat* and facilitate attack campaigns in both Europe and Tunisia.[111]

ISIS is unique in the Libyan Salafi-jihadi environment because of its incorporation of non-Maghrebi fighters. ISIS's Libyan fighters, mostly from the Ansar al Sharia network, have disagreed over objectives and strategy with the group's foreign fighters, who identify more closely with ISIS's ideology.[112] This tension is common in transnational groups and is likely managed.

ISIS in Libya's leadership is historically foreign. Saudis, Iraqis, and Tunisians[113] have held top positions and maintained close ties between the Libyan branch with the core group in Iraq and Syria. This connection, demonstrated through joint media, persisted during the group's withdrawal from Sirte.[114] Attrition occurred in the mid- and upper-level leadership cadre, including religious leadership, during the

battle for Sirte.[115] Subsequent US airstrikes set back efforts to reconstitute mid-level leadership. The prevalence of Tunisian fighters and leadership[116] raises the possibility that ISIS in Libya will reorient on Tunisia as it reconstitutes.

Military Capabilities. ISIS in Libya has strategic planning capabilities that allow it to prepare synchronous campaigns serving multiple objectives. Its military capabilities are degraded to the operational or tactical level but may be reconstituting. ISIS in Libya is currently able to design complex attacks against secure targets and convoys. It can also establish checkpoints[117] in Libya's interior and hold low-level positions temporarily. It likely lacks the force strength to seize significant urban terrain at present, although divisions among Libyan factions may facilitate a soft ISIS takeover.

ISIS in Libya hosts significant asymmetric capabilities. It detonated as many as nine VBIEDs within 24 hours in the defense of Sirte.[118] It withdrew these bomb-making capabilities from Sirte to preserve them and resumed limited VBIED production in fall 2017.[119] ISIS units are also tactically trained to conduct effective raids and terrorist attacks.

Media. ISIS in Libya is resuming media production[120] after a pause caused by the retreat from Sirte. Its media remains thematically linked with ISIS's global messaging.[121] ISIS's governance in Sirte previously played a central role in ISIS propaganda. The group hosted advanced media capabilities in Libya,[122] but it is unclear if this infrastructure remains.

The primary audiences for ISIS's propaganda are potential recruits and the international community. The expansion of the caliphate to Libya galvanized African recruitment. ISIS in Libya produced videos from militants of different African nationalities calling on their compatriots to emigrate.[123] ISIS has also reached out to the Libyan population through media,[124] but with less success than other Libyan Salafi-jihadi groups more embedded in local contexts. ISIS has also participated in public dialogue and criticism of rival Salafi-jihadi groups in Libya.[125]

Financing. ISIS draws funding from multiple sources. The core group provided startup financing for the Libyan branches, but this flow has likely ceased.[126] ISIS in Libya came under financial pressure by mid-2016, hindered by its inability to generate economic opportunities for the taxable population in Sirte. Insufficient financing limited its operations in Sirte, although it did draw limited benefits from control over local human trafficking and artifact smuggling rackets.[127]

ISIS in Libya is gaining new access to Libya's illicit economy. It has a known presence in southern Libya's smuggling and trafficking hubs. Since the loss of Sirte, ISIS has developed pragmatic relationships with marginalized communities and allied with a kingpin in southwestern Libya.[128] Separately, ISIS likely draws limited revenue from checkpoints in central Libya. It may also have access to state salaries through local intermediaries as well as the smuggling of subsidized fuel, which is pervasive in Libya.

Notes

1. AQIM may have assisted with ISIS's reconstitution in the Libyan desert after the loss of Sirte city, for example. See Adam Nathan, "Isil 'Regrouping in Southern Libya with Support of al-Qaeda and Preparing for Further Attacks,'" *Telegraph*, March 1, 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/01/isil-regrouping-southern-libya-support-al-qaeda-preparing-attacks/.

2. ISIS co-opted Ansar al Sharia networks in Sirte and also had potential ties to the group in Ajdabiya. See Jason Pack, Rhiannon Smith, and Karim Mezran, *The Origins and Evolution of ISIS in Libya*, Atlantic Council, June 2017, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/the-origins-and-evolution-of-isis-in-libya. The groups cooperated against the LNA in Benghazi, although their relationship is strained. See Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council, "La Tahsibuhu shira' lakum bel huwa khayr lakum" [Do not think it is bad for you, rather it is good for you], January 10, 2016, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/majlis-shucc84racc84-thucc84wacc84r-binghacc84zicc84-22do-not-think-it-bad-for-you-rather-it-is-good-for-you22.pdf. ISIS and Ansar al Sharia Libya also have mutual links to other Salafi-jihadi groups, such as Ansar al Sharia Tunisia. See MENASTREAM, "Ansar Al Sharia Leader Alive in Derna," Twitter, December 11, 2016, https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/808006691514105857; and Mapping Militant Organizations, "Ansar al-Shariah (Tunisia)," Stanford University, August 24, 2016, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/547.

3. Ansar al Sharia and related militias expelled ISIS from Derna after their governance systems came into conflict. See Emily Estelle and Katherine Zimmerman, "Fighting Forces in Libya," AEI's Critical Threats Project, March 3, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/backgrounder-fighting-forces-in-libya.

4. A center of gravity is "the source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act." A critical capability is "a means that is considered a crucial enabler for a center of gravity to function as such and is essential to the accomplishment of the specified or assumed objective(s)." A critical requirement is "an essential condition, resource, and means for a critical capability to be fully operational." A critical vulnerability is "an aspect of a critical requirement which is deficient or vulnerable to direct or indirect attack that will create decisive or significant effects." US Department of Defense, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*," August 2017, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/dictionary.pdf.

5. Katherine Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy: The Salafi-Jihadi Movement*, AEI's Critical Threats Project, July 18, 2017, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/americas-real-enemy-the-salafi-jihadi-movement.

6. Ian Black, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—From al-Qaida to the Arab Spring," *Guardian*, September 5, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/05/libyan-islamic-fighting-group-leaders.

7. Alison Pargeter, "Political Islam in Libya," Jamestown Foundation, May 5, 2005, https://jamestown.org/program/political-islam-in-libya/.

8. Eliza Griswold, "The Heir," *New Republic*, July 20, 2010, https://newrepublic.com/article/75949/the-heir.

9. Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, "Islamic Militants Among Prisoners Freed from Libyan Jail," CNN, August 26, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/08/26/libya.militants.analysis/index.html.

10. Estelle and Zimmerman, "Fighting Forces in Libya."

11. Ibid.

12. Aaron Y. Zelin, "Know Your Ansar al-Sharia," *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/21/know-your-ansar-al-sharia/.

13. Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy*.

14. Shura councils are Islamic consultative councils. The shura councils discussed in this report are effectively militia coalitions that also take on a governing role when possible.

15. Cameron Glenn, "Libya's Islamists: Who They Are—and What They Want," Wilson Center, August 8, 2017, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/libyas-islamists-who-they-are-and-what-they-want.

16. Frederic Wehrey, "Whoever Controls Benghazi Controls Libya," *Atlantic*, July 1, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/

archive/2017/07/benghazi-libya/532056/.

17. Glenn, "Libya's Islamists."

18. Al Arabiya, "Benghazi Declared 'Islamic Emirate' by Militants," July 31, 2014, https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/07/31/Libya-s-Ansar-al-Sharia-declares-Islamic-state-in-Benghazi.html.

19. Estelle and Zimmerman, "Fighting Forces in Libya."

20. For example, Ansar al Sharia–linked groups throughout Libya offered condolences and condemned an October 4 ISIS attack on Misrata. These groups seek to distance themselves from ISIS, which is seen as more extreme, and maintain support from Misrata. See MENASTREAM, "Statements Released By Shura Councils," Twitter, October 5, 2017, https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/915890773853396992.

21. The Grand Mufti of Libya Sadiq al Ghariani has called for jihad against the LNA. He is the spiritual leader of the Benghazi Defense Brigades, which are part of the Libyan Salafi-jihadi base. See Hani Shennib, "The Barak al-Shati Massacre Shows a Weakened UN-Supported Government and a Fractured Country," Atlantic Council, May 25, 2017, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-barak-al-shati-massacre-shows-a-weakened-un-supported-government-and-a-fractured-country; and Andrew McGregor, "Libya's Military Wild Card: The Benghazi Defense Brigades and the Massacre as Brak al-Shatti," Jamestown Foundation, June 2, 2017, https://jamestown.org/program/libyas-military-wild-card-benghazi-defense-brigades-massacre-brak-al-shatti/.

22. Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Becoming a Foreign Fighter: A *Second* Look at the Sinjar Records," in *Bombers, Bank Accounts, & Bleedout: Al-Qai'ida's Road in and out of Iraq*, edited by Brian Fishman, Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, July 2008, 38, https://ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Sinjar_2_FINAL.pdf.

23. Eric Knecht, "Libyan Islamist Group Ansar Al-Sharia Says It Is Dissolving," Reuters, May 27, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/libyan-islamist-group-ansar-al-sharia-says-it-is-dissolving-idUSKBN18N0YR.

24. Libya Herald, "BRSC Spokesman Mohamed Bakir Arrested in Misrata," September 2, 2017, https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/09/02/brsc-spokesman-mohamed-bakr-arrested-in-misrata/.

25. Insurgencies require a connection to a population. This requirement is partly ideological. Al Qaeda, for example, sees itself as a "vanguard force" that empowers local groups with the intent of reordering society throughout the Muslim world. See Zimmerman, "America's Real Enemy," 10–13. Maintaining ties to the population is also pragmatic for insurgencies, which require resources to sustain protracted fights against conventional adversaries. See US Department of the Army, *Army Field Manual 3-24 Counterinsurgency*, December 2006, https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=468442.

26. Zimmerman, *America's Real Enemy*, 10.

27. ISIS took over Sirte by exploiting the seam between warring forces and by imposing itself on a marginalized population that could not call on other Libyan communities for support. See Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict, "Libya: Protect Vulnerable Minorities & Assist Civilians Harmed," October 2011, 2, https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/civic-ri_libya_report_2011_final.pdf.

28. Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Qaeda's Strengthening in the Shadows," testimony before the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland Security, US House of Representatives, July 13, 2017, https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017-07-13-Al-Qaeda-Homeland-Security-Testimony.pdf.

29. SITE Intelligence Group, "In 1st Video Release in 2017, IS' Barqah Province in Libya Shows Attacks in Jufra and Nufaliya," September 24, 2017, https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/in-1st-video-release-in-2017-is-barqah-province-in-libya-shows-attacks-in-jufra-and-nufaliya.html.

30. Mapping Militant Organizations, "Ansar al-Shariah (Libya)"; and Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya Fights on Under New Leader," Long War Journal, June 30, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

31. Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Rise and Decline of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya," Hudson Institute, April 6, 2015, https://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya.

32. For example, ISIS could not stop the exodus of residents when it failed to provide sufficient governance in Sirte. See Middle East Eye, "Cash-Strapped IS Sells Chickens and Eggs to Raise Funds in Libya," May 3, 2016, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/

cash-strapped-struggles-raise-funds-libya-447441676.

33. Glenn, "Libya's Islamists."

34. Rukmini Callimachi and Eric Schmitt, "Manchester Bomber Met with ISIS Unit in Libya, Officials Say," *New York Times*, June 3, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/world/middleeast/manchester-bombing-salman-abedi-islamic-state-libya.html; and Mora-jea and Faucon, "In Libya, Islamic State Seeks Revival in Gateway to Europe."

35. Mouthaz Mathi, "Benghazi Militants Admit It Was Their Supply Ships Sunk UN Misrata on Sunday," Libya Herald, October 27, 2016, https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/10/27/benghazi-militants-admit-it-was-their-supply-ships-sunk-in-misrata-on-sunday/.

36. The civil war prevented anti-ISIS forces, such as the al Bunyan al Marsous coalition and the Libyan National Army, from coordinating operations against ISIS in Sirte. The isolation of Bani Walid, a Qaddafi loyalist refuge, similarly hindered its ability to counter ISIS. See Peter Cole, "Tribe, Security, Justice, and Peace in Libya Today," United States Institute of Peace, September 2, 2016, 24–25, https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/09/tribe-security-justice-and-peace-libya-today.

37. Katherine Zimmerman and Alix Halloran, "Warning from the Sahel: Al Qaeda's Resurgent Threat," AEI's Critical Threats Project, September 1, 2016, https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/warning-from-the-sahel-al-qaedas-resurgent-threat.

38. Estelle and Zimmerman, "Fighting Forces in Libya."

39. Callimachi and Schmitt, "Manchester Bomber Met with ISIS Unit in Libya, Officials Say."

40. Moutaz Ali, "Sadek Ghariani Says the Serraj-Hafter Meeting Is a Conspiracy," Libya Herald, May 3, 2017, https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/05/03/sadek-ghariani-says-the-serraj-hafter-meeting-is-a-conspiracy/; Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna, "Oh God, Guide Us to Our Brothers Revolutionaries Saraya," April 18, 2017, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/majlis-shucc84racc84-al-mujacc84hidicc84n-darnah-22advice-to-our-brothers-of-the-revolutionary-brigades22.pdf.

41. SITE Intelligence Group, "IS Spokesman Rallies Fighters, Blasts U.S.-Led Campaign Against IS," May 21, 2016, https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-spokesman-rallies-fighters-blasts-u-s-led-campaign-against-is.html.

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Glossary

Abdul Rahman al Swehli. The chairman of the GNA High Council of State. He is from Misrata in north-western Libya and previously supported Libya Dawn.[1]

Ageela Saleh Issa. The president and speaker of the Libyan House of Representatives. The US sanctioned Saleh for obstructing the GNA.[2] He is from al Qubba in northeastern Libya.

Ahmed Maetig. The deputy prime minister–designate of the GNA and the vice-chairman of the GNA Presidency Council. He is from Misrata in northwestern Libya. Maetig briefly took office as prime minister of the General National Congress in 2014 during the political crisis that became the Operation Dignity–Libya Dawn conflict.[3]

Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council (ARSC). An Islamist militant group formed in 2015 that has ties to Ansar al Sharia. Elements of the ARSC reportedly defected to ISIS in early 2016.[4] The ARSC is inactive, but some members now participate in the Operations Room for the Liberation of the Cities of Ajdabiya and Support for the Revolutionaries of Benghazi.[5]

Ajdabiya. A city located on the road to eastern Libya's largest cities and ports. It was previously a major smuggling and trafficking hub.[6]

Al Bunyan al Marsous (BAM). A coalition of primarily Misratan militias that formally submits to the GNA's Presidency Council as commander in chief but operates independently in practice. BAM forces captured Sirte city from ISIS in 2016 with US air support.

al Qaeda. The network of Salafi-jihadi groups and individuals affiliated or associated[7] with the organization led by Ayman al Zawahiri, including Ansar al Sharia in Libya.

al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Al Qaeda's premier affiliate in northern and western Africa. It originally formed from the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. AQIM and affiliated groups now operate in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Côte d'Ivoire.[8]

Ali al Sallabi. An influential former Muslim Brotherhood cleric and Qatari interlocutor. He helped funnel Qatari funds to help rebels fight against the Qaddafi regime.

Amazigh (Berber). An indigenous North African ethnic group. Libyan Amazigh live primarily in the Nafusa Mountains in northwest Libya.

Ansar al Sharia. A Salafi-jihadi group established during the 2011 Libyan revolution that is part of al Qaeda's network in Libya. Ansar al Sharia included two separate organizations: one in Derna and the now defunct group in Benghazi, as well as smaller affiliates throughout Libya. Individuals associated with Ansar al Sharia members carried out the September 2012 attacks on the US diplomatic mission in Benghazi.[9]

AQIM. See Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

ARSC. See Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council.

BAM. See Al Bunyan al Marsous.

BDB. See Benghazi Defense Brigades.

Beida interim government. A parallel administration aligned with the House of Representatives that challenges the Government of National Accord. It is based in Beida in eastern Libya and led by Prime Minister Abdullah al Thinni.

Benghazi Defense Brigades (**BDB**). A militia coalition comprised of Islamist-leaning military officers and Salafi-jihadi fighters, including former members of the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council. Its stated goal is to return internally displaced persons to their homes in Benghazi. Its primary opponent is the LNA.[10]

Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (**BRSC**). A coalition of Islamist militants, which declared an Islamic emirate in Benghazi in 2014. Its members include Ansar al Sharia Benghazi and the Muslim Brotherhood–backed 17th February Martyrs Brigade.

Benghazi. The second-largest city in Libya and the regional capital of eastern Libya. The 2011 revolution began in Benghazi. Different regional players have since fought for control of the city. Islamist and Salafi-jihadi militias, including Ansar al Sharia, controlled large parts of Benghazi at the time of the September 12, 2012, attack on US government facilities in the city.

BRSC. See Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council.

da'wa. The obligation to call others to the Islamic faith. For Islamists, the practice of *da'wa* includes charity, teaching, and the larger goal of reforming society in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law and values.[11]

Derna. A coastal city in northeastern Libya with long-standing ties to Salafi-jihadi networks.[12]

fatwa. A legal ruling from an Islamic religious leader.

Fayez al Serraj. The prime minister–designate of the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the chairman of the GNA's Presidency Council. He previously represented Tripoli as a member of the Tobruk Parliament.

Fezzan. A region in southwestern Libya. It is a sparsely populated hub for smuggling and trafficking controlled by the Tebu, Tuareg, and various Arab tribes.

General National Congress (**GNC**). A rump Islamist parliament. It was Libya's legislature from 2012 until the election of the House of Representatives in 2014. It held onto power with support from the Libya Dawn coalition until the formation of the Government of National Accord in 2015.

GNA. See Government of National Accord.

GNC. See General National Congress.

Government of National Accord (**GNA**). A UN-backed unity government established by the Libyan Political Agreement in 2015.

hawala. A money transfer system based on brokers and trust relationships.

HCS. See High Council of State.

High Council of State (**HCS**). A consultative body comprised of former GNC members under the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement.

hisbah. Refers to religious police responsible for enforcing *shari'a*. *Hisbah* is an Islamic doctrine that requires promoting good and forbidding wrong.[13]

HoR. See House of Representatives.

House of Representatives (**HoR**). A formerly internationally recognized legislature based in Tobruk in eastern Libya. The Libya Dawn coalition ousted the HoR from Tripoli in 2014. The HoR is meant to become the GNA's legislature under the Libyan Political Agreement, which HoR leadership has blocked.

Ibadism. An Islamic sect that is neither Sunni nor Shi'a.[14] It is commonly practiced among the Libyan Amazigh community in the Nafusa Mountains.

ISIS. See Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham.

Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (**ISIS**). The network of Salafi-jihadi individuals and groups affiliated with the group led by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi. ISIS has three *wilayat* in Libya: Tarablus, Barqah, and Fezzan.

Islamism. An ideology whose adherents believe that Islamic law or values should be the foundation for politics, law, and moral life.[15]

Jabhat al Somoud. A Misratan Islamist militia that supports the National Salvation Government and former GNC.

Khalifa Ghwell. The self-proclaimed prime minister of the National Salvation Government affiliated with the former General National Congress.

Khalifa Haftar. Field Marshal Haftar commands eastern Libya's largest fighting force, the Libyan National Army. He defected from the Qaddafi regime in the 1980s.

Kufra. A district in southeastern Libya that is the site of an active ethnic conflict, a smuggling hub, and a transit zone for militant groups.

Libya Dawn. A defunct coalition of Islamist, Misratan, and other western Libyan forces. It seized Tripoli in the 2014 civil war but later fractured due to internal tensions.[16]

Libyan Investment Authority. The body responsible for overseeing Libya's sovereign wealth fund.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (**LIFG**). A Salafi-jihadi group with ties to al Qaeda that attempted to overthrow the Qaddafi regime. It formally disbanded and renounced violence in 2010. The LIFG human network remains influential within violent and non-violent Islamist organizations in Libya.

Libyan National Army. A coalition of military units, local and tribal militias, and Salafi fighters led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The LNA controls the populated areas of eastern Libya, the oil crescent region, and military sites in the southwest.

Libyan National Oil Corporation (**NOC**). The only body authorized to export Libyan oil products under UN resolutions.[17] Its chairman is Mustafa Sanalla.

Libyan Political Agreement (**LPA**). A partially implemented UN-brokered deal signed by Libyan political factions in December 2015 to create the GNA unity government. The UN is currently leading talks to amend the LPA.

LIFG. See Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

LPA. See Libyan Political Agreement.

Madkhalism. A type of Salafism that promotes obedience to a legitimate Muslim ruler. The movement is led by Saudi cleric Rabee al Madkhali.

Misrata. A city-state, business hub, and center of postrevolution power in northwestern Libya. The Qaddafi regime besieged Misrata in 2011. Misratan forces participated in the Libya Dawn and al Bunyan al Marsous coalitions.

Misratan Third Force. A force that secured oil sites, military installations, and population centers in southwestern Libya between 2014 and 2017.

MSCD. See Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna.

Muslim Brotherhood. A political Islamist organization that seeks to reform society according to Islamic laws and values.[18] The Libyan branch was an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and faced repression under the Qaddafi regime. It currently operates through both a political party (the Justice and Construction Party) and associated armed groups.

Muammar al Qaddafi. The late dictator of Libya. Qaddafi took power in a military coup in 1969 and ruled until his death during the 2011 revolution.

Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna (**MSCD**). An alliance of Islamist militias, including Ansar al Sharia Derna, that controls Derna city. It opposes ISIS and the LNA.

National Salvation Government (**NSG**). The rump government associated with the former GNC parliament. It stepped down in 2016 but has sought to regain power in Tripoli.[19]

National Transitional Council (**NTC**). The internationally recognized council that led the Libyan opposition during the 2011 revolution and its immediate aftermath.

NOC. See Libyan National Oil Corporation.

NSG. See National Salvation Government.

NTC. See National Transitional Council.

Oil Crescent. A region in north-central Libya that contains the majority of the country's oil reserves and two major export terminals.

Operation Dignity. An operation launched by Khalifa Haftar in 2014 in Benghazi that sought to defeat Islamists in Libya.[20] Haftar's forces declared victory in Benghazi in 2017.

Operation Libya Dawn. An operation by Islamist and Misratan militia groups that began in summer 2014 to capture Tripoli and counter the Operation Dignity offensive.[21] Libya Dawn forces ousted the HoR from Tripoli and reinstated the GNC parliament.

Presidency Council. A nine-member executive body formed by the 2015 LPA. It leads the GNA and is intended to represent Libya's major factions.

Rada Special Deterrence Force (**Tripoli**). A Madkhali Salafi group led by Abdel Raouf Kara that recognizes the GNA. It is a primary counter-ISIS force in Tripoli and a self-declared moral police. There are other groups named "Rada" operating in Libya that are not affiliated with Kara's militia.

Sabratha. A human trafficking hub in northwestern Libya. ISIS based near Sabratha between 2014 and early 2016.

Sadiq al Ghariani. The Grand Mufti of Libya and head of the Dar al Ifta (Fatwa House) religious authority. He is a spiritual leader for Islamist militias and some Salafi-jihadi groups.

Saif al Islam al Qaddafi. The heir apparent of late Libyan dictator Muammar al Qaddafi. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court. Saif al Islam was captured by Zintani militias in 2011 but released in 2017 under an amnesty law by Libya's eastern government.[22]

Salafi-jihadi base. "The physical network of people, groups, and organizations who subscribe to Salafi-jihadi ideology and operate in pursuit of shared over-all goals."[23]

Salafi-jihadi movement. "The ideological movement that holds that it is a religious obligation for individual Muslims to use armed force to cause the establishment of a true Muslim state governed under a Salafi interpretation of *shari'a*."[24]

Salafism. An ideology whose followers seek to return to the fundamentals of Islam as practiced righteously by the earliest generation of Muslims (the *Salaf*).[25]

Sirte. A city on the central Libyan coast that ISIS governed from 2014 to 2016. It is Muammar al Qaddafi's hometown.

Tripoli. Libya's capital and home to one-sixth of the country's population. It is nominally controlled by the GNA through a loose patchwork of militias.

Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade. A powerful Tripoli militia led by Haithem al Tajouri that nominally supports the GNA. It opposes Misrata, the Muslim Brotherhood, and associated armed Islamist groups.

Tuareg. An ethnic group found in southwestern Libya, Algeria, and the western Sahel.

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). A special mission established in September 2011 to support Libya's transitional authorities.[26] Lebanese academic Ghassan Salamé is the current Special Representative and head of UNSMIL.

wilayah. Province.

wilayat. Provinces. Plural of *wilayah*.

Zintan. A city-state in northwestern Libya. Zintani forces temporarily seized Tripoli as part of Operation Dignity in 2014.

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Acknowledgments

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