



Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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Rebel in eastern Libya

TALIBAN SPOKESMAN SEES “PRESCRIPTION OF DEMOCRACY” AS PART OF U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid gave an interview to the media service of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” on February 23 concerning the “current political and military situation” in Afghanistan. The interview was carried by a number of jihadi websites (Ansar1.info, February 24).

Zabihullah begins by addressing the efforts in Kabul to launch a session of the new parliament five months after a vote that was marked by fraud and court challenges. Following an extended dispute, parliamentarians have finally agreed on Uzbek warlord Abdul Rahoof Ibrahim as the new Speaker of Parliament, the last step in enabling the new parliament to begin work (Reuters, February 27). Zabihullah, however, views the parliament as “part of the invaders’ military strategy,” fulfilling a “strategic military need” for U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban spokesman explained the rationale of foreign support for the “fake parliament” - efforts of the invaders to “enforce their ‘prescription’ of democracy” have resulted in a “popular elected government and parliament; hence no one has the right to continue their struggle against the elected government.” By “purchasing” puppet MPs, the foreign invaders will succeed in obtaining a long-term strategic alliance with Afghanistan that will allow a continued foreign military presence. Zabihullah challenges the legitimacy of the new government, suggesting the parliamentarians “are accountable for crimes and corruption” and their work will be limited to “pocketing salaries.”

Claims by General David Petraeus that the Coalition is making progress in securing Afghanistan are also challenged by the Taliban spokesman, who responds that such statements are made under “great political pressure” given the enormous

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cost of the occupation in lives and public funds: It is a known fact that the invaders have been defeated in Afghanistan, but they continue their propaganda through which they want to compel the world to believe in their so-called progress in Afghanistan.” Zabihullah cites a report by an unnamed European security firm that claimed there was a 64% increase in Taliban attacks in 2010.

Responding to claims by Kabul’s National Directorate for Security that 1,500 Taliban militants have switched sides in northern Afghanistan, Zabihullah says the mujahideen are actually gaining momentum in the north and that Kabul is attempting to introduce various warlords as Taliban before claiming their defection to the government (Central Asia Online, February 11).

The Taliban see a direct connection between the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and the economic crisis in the West: “Fortunately, [the occupiers] were faced with distressing resistance and for ten long years they have been trapped in a ruinous war. As a result, the Coalition countries, particularly America, are suffering a terrible economic depression.”

However, Zabihullah believes public opposition to the war is growing in the West as politicians begin to waver in their support for the ongoing and unusually lengthy conflict. The Taliban spokesman concludes by raising the specter of the Vietnam War, where Americans “had dreadful experiences and even up until today every American has a particular sense of fear and terror about it; hence, in such a situation the invasion and overrunning of a war-torn, small Afghanistan, which seemed very easy and almost costless to them, turned out to be very difficult and enormously expensive.”

OROMO LIBERATION FRONT CALLS FOR “EGYPTIAN AND TUNISIAN-STYLE REVOLUTION” IN ETHIOPIA

Political reverberations from the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt continue to sweep through the Horn of Africa, which has already witnessed demonstrations against the Transitional Federal Government and its Islamist opponents in Somalia (see *Terrorism Monitor* Briefs, February 17). Now militants belonging to Ethiopia’s Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) have called for all of Ethiopia’s ethnic and religious groups to emulate the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts and unite in deposing the Tigrayan-dominated government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, leader of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation

Front, the major element of the ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition.

In a statement broadcast in both Afan Oromo and Amharic, the OLF maintained that only a revolution in the streets could command the attention of the West: “Until [Addis Ababa] becomes the next Tunis or Cairo, their ears will not listen,” though “most of the superpower countries, the hitherto supporters and handlers of the tyrannical regimes, were forced to quickly abandon their darlings and side with the people in revolt.” Most importantly, the Oromo must unite with Ethiopia’s Amharic speakers to provide a long-term solution to the country’s ills (*Jimma Times*, February 27).

The Oromo are the largest single ethnic group in Ethiopia and dwell principally in central and southern Ethiopia, though there is a high degree of social integration with Ethiopia’s Amharic-speaking peoples, the traditional rulers of the nation until 1991. The Oromo are religiously diverse, with members of the ethnic group following Islam, Christianity and traditional religions, but not all Oromo opposition leaders and parties agree on the necessity of a revolution.

In recent days, a joint operation along the border by Ethiopian and Kenyan military forces that began last November is reported to have resulted in the arrest of at least 120 OLF fighters and the seizure of a quantity of arms, grenades and missiles. The existence of a cross-border Oromo community is reported to have complicated efforts to identify OLF members; according to a local Kenyan provincial commissioner, “These people speak the local dialect and it may be hard to distinguish them from the locals but the locals themselves are volunteering information that will lead to their arrest.” The operation will continue to search for other OLF members (*Sudan Tribune*, February 26).

The OLF began an armed struggle for Oromo self-determination and local autonomy from the Amhara monarchy in 1973. After dropping out of the coalition government formed after the conclusion of the Ethiopian civil war and the fall of the communist Derg regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, the OLF then took up arms against the new Tigrayan-dominated government. Addis Ababa classifies the OLF as a terrorist organization and has accused it of being responsible for a series of bombings in Addis Ababa in 2008, a claim denied by the OLF (see the OLF statement published in the *Sudan Tribune*, May 29, 2008).

Despite assertions by Ethiopian authorities that the military capabilities of the OLF and its armed wing, the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), have been much diminished by constant pressure from government security services, the movement recently claimed that a special unit of the OLA operating in the OLF's so-called "Eastern Zone" raided and destroyed a government military base in Kombolcha, killing 19 soldiers and injuring 25 others (Voice of Oromo Liberation Radio, February 25; OLF News, February 26; for OLF military capabilities, see *Militant Leadership Monitor* Briefs, January 29, 2010). The attack and the alleged casualties have not been confirmed by government sources. Kombolcha is 12km from the commercial center of Harar. The OLA has also claimed responsibility for the February assassination of a government intelligence official in the Eastern Oromia district who was accused of harassing members of the local Oromo community. An OLA statement warned: "Those who continue to be part of the TPLF killing machine will face the same death penalty unless they refrain from such evil acts" (OLF News, February 6; *Jimma Times*, February 9).

among local residents. The attacks make it clear that the militants, who had dispersed and fled to Afghanistan and adjacent tribal areas during the operation, are regrouping and trying to regain a foothold in the region.

A former princely state until its incorporation into Pakistan in 1969 and now divided into two districts, lower Dir and Upper Dir, of the Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa province (formerly the North-West Frontier Province), Dir borders Swat, the Bajaur Agency, the Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and Afghanistan. [1] Except for the small Dogh Darra area, Dir remained largely undisturbed in recent years, even as militant activities in the region increased. As the Taliban made inroads in the district in early 2007, fighters from Swat, Bajaur and South Waziristan fled to Dir to escape military operations. The Taliban continued their subversive activities under the leadership of Dir TTP Commander Hafizullah and gained momentum during April 2008. [2] Dir has also remained a strong base for the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM). The hometown of TNSM founder Maulana Sufi Muhammad is in Dir (See *Terrorism Monitor*, March 26, 2009).

In early 2009, Taliban from neighboring Swat started to assert their authority in the area, leading the military to launch an operation against the militants in April 2009. Operational commander Colonel Nadeem Mirza declared the entire area of Dir clear of militants following the operation (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], April 22, 2010).

Since the beginning of 2011, however, the Taliban have started targeting "pro-government" elders and police – sending not only shockwaves throughout the population of Dir but also belying the military's claims of clearing the area of the militants.

Taliban Regroups in Pakistan's Dir Region after Successful Government Offensive

By Zia Ur Rehman

Despite the Pakistani government's announcement that its military offensive in the mountainous Dir region of northwest Pakistan had succeeded in securing the area, recent attacks by militants of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have not only belied the military's claims but have also whipped up fear

On January 25, militants attacked a guest house belonging to Zahid Khan, an Awami National Party (ANP - the ruling party in Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa) member of the Senate, killing a guard and inflicting injuries on Khan's brother. Khan's family had received several threats from the militants for their ties to the ANP, a main ally in flushing militants out from Dir (*Dawn*, [Karachi], January 26). Three police officials were severely injured when a roadside bomb went off near a police van in the Samar Bagh area of Lower Dir. Members of a local anti-Taliban militia pursued the militants, killing two of them (*Dawn*, [Karachi], January 3).

However, there have been successes in counterterrorism operations in the region. On February 4, a tip-off led Lower Dir police to raid the house of militant preacher Maulvi Jalaluddin in the Chakdara Afghan refugee camp, arresting him along with his four sons. Jalaluddin had regular contacts amongst the Pakistani and Afghan militants and police recovered a huge cache of weapons and ammunitions in the raid (*Dawn*, [Karachi], February 5). Similarly, security forces killed eleven armed militants on the Dir-Swat border on February 10. The men were trying to enter Swat through Dir and police increased their numbers in the area to avoid further penetration of militants into Swat (Daily Shamal [Swat], February 11). On February 23, police in the Khal area arrested two cousins of Commander Hafizullah who were involved in the January attack on Zahid Khan's guest house (Daily Azadi [Swat], February 23).

Local tribal elders in Dir suggest that accomplices of Maulana Fazlullah, head of TTP Swat, may be behind the increased militancy in the area. Media reports claimed that Fazlullah and his supporters had fled to the Nuristan province of Afghanistan due to military operation in Swat in 2009 (BBC Urdu, November 17, 2009). However, it is possible Fazlullah's group has started returning and is now targeting its rivals.

Six men logging forest wood, all from Dir, were kidnapped by Taliban militants in August 2010 and taken to Nuristan. A few days later, the throat-slit bodies of the three men were found in Arandu, an area of Chitral near the Afghanistan border. The abductees belonged to Dogh Darra, an area of Dir where the locals of 25 villages had formed an armed anti-Taliban militia and killed many militants in June 2009, including two commanders. The confrontation between the locals of Dogh Darra and the militants started on June 5, 2010 when a suicide attack at a local mosque in Dogh Darra killed 30 tribesmen (*The News* [Islamabad], October 10, 2010).

An elder of Dogh Darra's anti-Taliban militia said the network of Taliban militants kidnap "pro-government" people from Dir and its surrounding areas and then haul them to Nuristan (News on Sunday [Islamabad], October 10, 2010). Omar Hasan Ahrabi, spokesperson of the TTP group that claimed responsibility for kidnapping the Dogh Darra men, warned that all those joining the anti-Taliban militias would not be spared, as they were government agents who opposed the enforcement of Shari'a in Swat and Dir (*The News* [Karachi], Sep 2, 2010). Nuristan governor Jamaluddin Badar has also

expressed his concern over the infiltration of militants from the Chitral and Dir areas of Pakistan to Nuristan's Bargmatal and Kamdesh districts (Weesa Warzpanra, [Kabul], January 24). While the Nuristan governor worried about the penetration of Taliban militants from Pakistan into Afghanistan, Malakand police head Qazi Jamil Ur Rehman announced that police and security forces had established checkpoints in the areas bordering the Chitral and Dir districts in order to stop the infiltration of Taliban from Afghanistan (Central Asia Online, January 26).

Dir has again become a hub of militancy as hundreds of militants flee from neighboring Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies to Dir because of on-going military operations in the tribal areas. [3] Those Taliban militants ousted from Swat and Dir by military operations are regrouping in neighboring Mohmand Agency to launch guerrilla warfare in Dir and elsewhere. Qari Abdul Jabbar, a militant from Dir, may have become the new face of militancy in the region by replacing Fazlullah. In Dir, locals said they had heard about Jabbar, who is leading a small group of around 400 militants chased out of Malakand division ago (*Express Tribune* [Karachi], December 9, 2010).

Military and government officials say the resurgent Taliban will not be able to regain control of Dir, but are likely to restrict their fight to hit-and-run tactics, an ideal guerrilla warfare approach in Dir's rugged terrain. The threat posed by militants regrouping in Dir has had a significant impact on neighboring districts and tribal areas. Because of its location bordering Swat, Chitral, Bajaur and Afghanistan, Dir can provide a strategic base for attacks in these areas as well as providing sanctuary to militants fleeing military operations in neighboring regions.

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Notes:

1. Author's conversation with Javed Sheikh, a Dir-based journalist, February 15, 2011.
2. Author's conversation with Aqeel Yousafzai, a Peshawar-based expert and author of two books on militancy in Pakistan's tribal areas, February 16, 2011.
3. Author's conversation with Aqeel Yousafzai, Feb 15, 2011.

“How I Joined Jihad”: Nigerian Bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in His Own Words (Part Two)

By Murad Batal Al-Shishani

Part one of this article examined the growing alienation that consumed would-be airline bomber Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab as a student in a school with few other Muslims, and the transformation that occurred when he discovered the “Islam Forum” on the internet and began to absorb the Salafist concepts explained there (see *Terrorism Monitor*, February 17).

By seeking a solution to his psychological and intellectual dilemma, Abdulmutallab connected himself to a “cyber ummah” [Islamic community], while his feeling of anxiety led him to different intellectual havens, particularly on the web. Three examples can be cited to reveal the change that occurred in his mind; his views on football, the mix of resources to which he resorted and his ideological attitude towards political change. The three examples show an intellectually troubled and conflicted person.

His views on football and the English league appear in his early forum contributions, in which he challenged the football knowledge of other forum participants (February 13, 2005). Yet several months later he talked about football as a waste of time causing a distraction from religious rituals. Although he did not say they should be prohibited, he called on those who practice their religion in the best manner to refrain from playing or watching football. He did, however, call for participation in martial sports such as shooting, running, etc. (November 15, 2005).

Another example of his confused state was the resources he sought. Umar commended influential Egyptian preachers Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Amr Khaled as he continued to follow al-Qaradawi’s “Islam Online” website. Both preachers stand apart from the Salafi-Jihadist trend, yet Abdulmutallab found some of the material published in English relating to Salafi-Jihadist thought attractive. A further example appears in his choice of religious direction and how it gradually led him to embrace radical ideas, as reflected in the following post: “Alright, I won’t go into too much

details about my fantasy, but basically they are jihad fantasies. I imagine how the great jihad will take place, how the Muslims will win Insh’Allah and rule the whole world, and establish the greatest empire once again!!!” (February 20, 2005).

Yet Umar Farouk returned to a more peaceful ideology when he referred to one of the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings (*hadith*) on forgiveness:

When a scholar told me this *hadith*, I said to myself, why not forgive Bush for invading Muslim lands and killing my Muslim brothers and sisters, all the people who oppress the Muslims and all people who do me wrong, for surely, Allah’s torment is enough for them if they don’t repent sincerely, I don’t need to add more torment on them. Also I might have oppressed so many people in ways I do not perceive, or hurt them, or cause them harm without knowing, so I hope Allah also forgives me for my own short coming... (March 24, 2005).

Although Umar Farouk used the jihadists’ arguments in criticizing Saudi Arabia for allowing non-Muslim and American forces to enter its lands (May 9, 2005), he remained, before his second visit to Yemen in 2007, a supporter of peaceful political change according to his Forum posts. Commenting on the achievements of the anti-Iraq war demonstrations in London, Abdulmutallab noted:

The following were achieved; 1. Recruitment into the British army has hit an all-time low - rock bottom. They are working hard and spending a lot more in order to get a few British troops to fight for their cause. 2. The 2.5 million people [in attendance at the demonstrations] made a big statement. They show that the majority of people oppose the war. Had they not attended because they thought the war would still take place anyway, then it would have been an almost established fact that people just don’t care. But they do, so they turned up in their multitudes. 3. The British and the American governments will at least now hesitate, and not hasten to go to war with Syria or Iran (February 14, 2006).

This view also appeared in his call for a week of solidarity with Guantanamo detainees at his university in January 2007.

It seems that Abdulmutallab was exposed to a variety of different ideas as he tried to connect himself to the “ummah,” though it was at first a virtual and imagined connection. His attraction to al-Qaeda grew as persons sought to recruit him through forum discussions, asking for “private chats” with him.

His attempt to create a physical connection to the ummah was described in this post:

I usually go to Central Masjid (mosque) London in Regents Park and I think it is possible I have seen an IF [Islam Forum] member. Also maybe I have met an IF member in an Islamic bookstore. There is one particular member that I think I met in a bookstore because of their catch phrases, “Masha Allah,” “Insha Allah” and so on. (I won’t mention the bookshop in case it’s that person). Anyway we might all just be wishful thinking, the chances are high that IF members haven’t seen each other, of course unless it has been prearranged. Maybe if we all had our real pics in our icons, we could spot each other in the masjid. Everyone seems reluctant to do that. (February 17, 2005)

Though naïve, this post shows the degree to which he was willing to connect with fellow Muslims. Shortly afterward, attempts to contact him began through online messages on MSN. This was the beginning of his direct instruction in jihadi ideas and sources through the development of personal contacts.

He was thus led as a non-Arabic speaker to the writings of Anwar al-Awlaki, who appeared to inspire those who were searching for jihadi ideology expressed in the English language. He later met al-Awlaki in Yemen, which Abdulmutallab visited in order to learn Arabic and to become attached to the ummah at the second level. During his second visit to Yemen, Abdulmutallab expressed admiration for the Arab-Islamic environment of the capital city, Sana’a, and for the use of the veil [niqab] by women there (June 23, 2005). It was at this point that he was recruited to al-Qaeda by the organization’s discourse based on the unity of the ummah, an essential concept for Abdulmutallab. This discourse won out over other Islamic political viewpoints due to a more professional and appealing use of the internet by its radical adherents.

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specialist on Islamic Movements in Chechnya and in the Middle East.

Note:

1. Spelling and typographical errors within Abdulmutallab’s messages have been corrected for ease of reading.

Special Report from Inside Libya: Assessing Libyan Rebel Forces

By Derek Henry Flood

Libyan rebel forces repulsed an advance on the Mediterranean seaport of Marsa al-Burayqah (also known as Marsa al-Brega) by Libyan government forces loyal to Colonel Mu’ammarr al-Qaddafi and African mercenaries in his employ. The loyalists were attempting to regain control of a Sirte Oil Company installation on the Gulf of Sirte, which lies between Benghazi and the Libyan capital of Tripoli. Libyan rebels advanced to the March 2 battle from the nearby town of Ajdabiyah and came in convoys from as far away as Benghazi to defend al-Burayqah from encroachment by Tripoli’s forces. [1]

Libya’s very ad hoc rebel movement does not currently appear to possess a clear command and control structure. According to a frontline spokesman, it is currently known as *Jaysh-e-Libi al-Hurra* (The Army of Free Libyan Forces) and the movement terms itself the “February 17 Revolution,” denoting the day the

uprising began in Benghazi, Libya's second city and one-time dual capital until the 1960s. Tribes comprising the anti-Qaddafi forces include the Maghrebi, Zwaiye, Zawawi, Faqri, and Gebayli. They insist their fight in Libya is not a civil war but a revolution with the aim of overthrowing Colonel Qaddafi's nearly 42-year reign and reunifying the country from its current state of bifurcation and *fawda* (anarchy). The local commander leading the surge against Tripoli's advances is a defecting brigadier general named Mahdi al-Arabi, who is purportedly a cousin of Colonel Qaddafi. [2]

Frontline forces, far removed from the intellectual architects of the provisional government being established in Benghazi, espouse no coherent political ideology. When pressed, the fighters profess no vision for the structure of a future state and have difficulty stating goals beyond the ouster of the current regime, other than vaguely stating "we are fighting for freedom and democracy." Libya's anti-regime forces insist the conflict is not a civil war pitting tribe or clan against one another, but is rather a genuine, society-wide armed revolt that will not halt until it reaches the gates of the capital, over 1000 kilometers west of their Benghazi stronghold.

Reaction to any suggestion of a Western or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) armed intervention reveals some nuance. Several rebels interviewed by Jamestown expressed a strong desire for American or European bombardment of Sirte and Tripoli in order to decapitate the Qaddafi regime and facilitate a total liberation of the nation. On the prospect of the formal entrance of foreign ground forces, one fighter named Fatah'allah proclaimed: "If NATO forces come inside Libya, we will turn it into a lake of blood. We can take care of Qaddafi ourselves. Iraq, Palestine, and Somalia will be nothing compared to Libya." As rebels head off to battle the air is filled with cries of "Allahu Akbar!" and "Mnoureen al-Shabaab!" ("The youth are the light"). Other fighters shout "We want to kill Mu'ammara Qaddafi right here!" The symbol of the rebels is the red, black and green tri-color used in Libya before the Sanusi monarchy was overthrown by Qaddafi and other officers in the 1969 military coup, though use of this symbol does not seem to be accompanied by popular support for the return of the Sanusi family, now living in European exile. Fighters don every imaginable pattern and color of camouflage, if wearing any sort of uniform at all. The rebels were emphatic that they had no affiliation with al-Qaeda or even any sympathy for the movement. All were very keen to stress the indigenous nature of the uprising.

In the rebel-controlled town of Ajdabiya, anti-Qaddafi forces displayed a vast array of captured Soviet-era weapons including a variety of anti-aircraft DShK models and Czech M59 Pragyas, howitzers, mortars, Kalashnikovs of every provenance and a token T-55 tank. Among the small arms carried by the opposition fighters were vintage double-barreled shotguns, hand grenades, surface-to-air shoulder fired rockets and RPG-7s with plenty of ammunition. Massive quantities of ammunition in olive sardine-like tins, looted from Libyan Army depots, are being ferried to the front in Mitsubishi pick-up trucks and captured government-issue Toyota Land Rovers fitted with heavy machine guns reminiscent of Somali technicals. Gunners manning swivel-mounted anti-aircraft rigs scan the skies over the northern Sahara while attempting to shoot down pro-Qaddafi warplanes and helicopters. A group of young men displayed metal shreds of a jet they claimed to have shot down preceding the author's visit to the front.

Jets, heard but not seen, bombarded rebel positions in a fierce battle that lasted several hours in which the rebel forces claimed victory at the end of the day (March 2). Government forces appeared on the battlefield in fairly new looking white Toyota sport utility vehicles which the rebels seemed to envy. In one captured vehicle, opposition fighters displayed a make shift cannabis pipe which appeared to have been very recently used and said that Qaddafi's forces were becoming intoxicated before the battle.

Another group of young men in Ajdabiya came forward with what appeared to be an Israeli-made illumination mortar shell amidst a batch of Russian-made shells. They claimed the lone mortar shell bearing a graphic depicting a Star of David suspended by a parachute was proof of Qaddafi's connivance with Israeli arms brokers and a testament to his sell-out of the Libyan people for money and power. [3] Elsewhere in Ajdabiya teenage boys were preparing crates of Molotov cocktails with petrol and Fanta bottles which they said were to be used as a last resort if they ran out of ammunition. One fighter told Jamestown: "We call Qaddafi Dracula. He sucked the blood out of the Libyan people and sucked the oil out of our soil for four decades. No more. Qaddafi, by Allah, is finished. We will finish him."

In what appeared to be a serious government and mercenary ground defeat, anti-Qaddafi soldiers boasted of beating back the invaders from al-Burayqah to a town called Bisher, 20 kilometers further west, and believed them to be retreating to the town of Ras

Salouf, almost 150km from the front. Both irregulars and dissident army commanders spoke of mercenaries from Francophone Sahel countries and Anglophone West Africa who they had seen fleeing al-Burayqah dressed in Libyan Army uniforms when their lines were overpowered by the rebels' counter-offensive. Rebels claimed to have captured a Chadian national left behind by Qaddafi loyalists heading to Bisher and stated that the employ of paid (or coerced) black Africans along the front was proof of the regime's inherent weakness and imminent defeat, in that the regime required non-nationals to defend its interests. Following the brief siege of al-Burayqah, rebel troops retook control of the Sirte Oil Company facility, the control of which many stressed was Colonel Qaddafi's ultimate goal, as well as retaking the Marsa Brega airport. [4] At the battle's conclusion, hundreds of Egyptian migrant workers fled the area while cheering the rebel victory.

During a celebration by thousands of fighters proclaiming the imminent demise of the regime, fighter jets suddenly soared overhead and strafed the area with inaccurate but deadly ordinance. Libya's anti-Qaddafi fighters, having control of the roads in virtually all of Cyrenaica, are operating a highly efficient evacuation route for wounded civilians and combatants with the most serious cases being transported across sand blown highways to superior medical facilities in Benghazi.

The key rebel objective is to consolidate control along the Mediterranean coast along the way to Sirte while coordinating with defecting forces in western Libya's Tripolitania region in order to eventually mount an assault on Tripoli itself. Many of the fighters are untrained agriculturalists and pastoralists who have volunteered in droves as the movement against Qaddafi's rule continued to gain momentum. One of the unknown elements in the scenario remains whether Mu'ammarr Qaddafi's Qaddahfa tribe may eventually turn their guns on the regime if the rebels appear to be winning. The Qaddahfa are considered a small tribe and may have to make a pragmatic decision on their loyalty if they are to survive in a "New Libya." Several rebel spokesmen repeated the claim that this conflict in the heart of North Africa was not a civil war between tribes resulting from any sort of festering historical favoritism or clan chauvinism, but a mass movement inspired by the fall of neighboring dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. Unlike the revolutions in Tunis and Cairo, which involved key civil society elements and occurred in societies with massive exposure to Western tourism, the Libyan revolution quickly devolved from

peaceful protests in downtown Benghazi to a violent military confrontation that is convulsing large parts of the country, potentially plunging previously isolated Libya into long-term chaos, or worse, a failed state on the European Union's doorstep.

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Notes:

1. Al-Burayqah (Marsa al-Brega) is a pre-fabricated town built by a Greek firm for oil workers near a desolate cornice. Other accounts of the battle described here were carried by al-Jazeera, March 2 and *The Guardian*, March 2.
2. Brigadier Mahdi al-Arabi was the armed forces' deputy chief-of-staff before his defection. There were reports in February that he had attempted to lead a coup against Qaddafi (al-Bawaba, February 21).
2. The 81mm Illum Para shell in question is similar to those used in the Israeli Soltam 81mm mortar. A defense news service reported in 2008 that Israel's Defense Ministry had approved arms sales to several Arab nations, including Libya, Iraq and Yemen. The deals were said to be negotiated through Arab intermediaries (Middle East Newswire, November 25, 2008).
3. The Sirte Oil company is a subsidiary of the state-owned National Oil Company and is a successor to the former Esso Standard Libya Inc.