



# Terrorism Monitor

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## A NEW PLAYER IN THE PROXY WARS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The Congolese province of Nord-Kivu, which borders both Rwanda and Uganda on its eastern side, is a land of active volcanoes, mountain gorillas, valuable minerals, warring militias and over 200,000 displaced people. It is also home to M23, a new and powerful militia composed of veteran rebels and professional soldiers. Well-armed and apparently more capable than local units of the national army, M23 poses a new challenge to efforts to restore stability to a region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that has been in a state of upheaval since the genocide in neighboring Rwanda in 1994.

M23 has its origins in the Nord-Kivu-based Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP) of General Laurent “The Chairman” Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi. The largely Tutsi CNDP is believed to have been sponsored by Rwanda to fight a proxy war with the Hutu supremacist Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a militia formed partly by former Hutu genocidaires. With the CNDP under pressure from an offensive by Congolese and Rwandan troops, the movement’s leadership split in January 2009. Nkunda was arrested and detained in Rwanda while General Bosco “The Terminator” Ntaganda, a Rwandan Tutsi wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes committed while both a rebel and an officer in the DRC national army, took control of the movement. Ntaganda agreed to integrate his forces with the Congolese national army, the Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), according to the terms of the March 23, 2009 peace agreement, which also ensured Kinshasha would not pursue the ICC warrants against Ntaganda and other CNDP officers. The ICC issued a fresh arrest warrant against Ntaganda on July 13

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related to crimes against humanity, murder, rape, pillaging, recruitment of child soldiers and sexual slavery (AFP, July 13). Thomas Lubanga, Ntaganda's former commander in the Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) / Forces Patriotique pour la Liberation du Congo (FPLC), was sentenced to 14 years in prison by the ICC earlier this month for recruiting and using child soldiers in the early 2000's.

M23 is named for the March 23, 2009 peace agreement that movement leaders claim Kinshasha has failed to honor (East African [Nairobi], July 16). The movement was born when Colonel Ntaganda led a March mutiny of up to 600 soldiers in Nord-Kivu. Though poor living conditions, pay interruptions and other reasons were cited, it is likely that the main causes of the military revolt were a plan to transfer the former CNDP troops under Ntaganda's command to another part of the DRC and a rumor that President Joseph Kabila had taken a new interest in enforcing the ICC warrant against Ntaganda. Colonel Ntaganda and other Tutsi officers profited from their control of rich mining areas of Nord-Kivu and by trading in tropical hardwoods grown in the region. The Tutsi officers and their men have opposed any transfer from the lucrative Kivu provinces and pose locally as the "protectors" of the Banyamulenge, Congolese Tutsis who live in the region. In the field with Ntaganda are three other senior officers, Colonel Baudouin Ngaruye, Colonel Innocent Zimurinda and Colonel Innocent Kaina, all of whom are accused of massacring civilians, mass rape, mutilations, and other crimes while profiting from illegal taxes on charcoal production and mining operations (IRIN [Nairobi], June 23; AFP, July 13).

The M23 movement can be viewed as a revival of the CNDP under a different name, but including many of the same individuals, leading Kinshasha to accuse Rwanda of resuming military and financial assistance to the militia. Congolese concern on this point is understandable – Rwandan forces have invaded the eastern DRC twice since 1998. Kigali in turn believes that Kinshasha has resumed support for Hutu extremists in the FDLR who are allegedly planning terrorist attacks in Rwanda.

A recent M23 offensive in a region bordering the Virunga national park captured the border town of Bunangana on July 6 and drove some 600 FARDC troops and thousands of refugees into Uganda (East African [Nairobi], July 16). The soldiers were disarmed and eventually returned to the DRC. Days later, a M23 spokesman announced the movement had pulled out of the area taken, saying the movement sought to bring the government to negotiations rather than control territory (AFP, July 13). The towns of Kiwandja and Rutshuru were handed over to local police and troops belonging to

the UN peacekeeping force, the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO). When the towns were re-occupied by FARDC troops the M23 warned the army to get out "or be held responsible for all the consequences" (AFP, July 13).

Believing that M23 was intent on seizing the Nord-Kivu capital of Goma, MONUSCO and the Congolese army deployed over a dozen tanks on the road to Goma. The M23, however, denied it had any such intentions: "Our mission is not to go to Goma. We are strong but we are also disciplined. We know what we are doing" (AFP, July 12; Xinhua, July 13). Three UN and two DRC MI24 and MI25 helicopters flown by Ukrainian pilots strafed M23 positions in the hills of southeast Virunga National Park with rockets and 30mm rounds (AFP, July 13).

In a recent meeting of the 11 nation International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (which includes Rwanda and the DRC), it was agreed to accept a "neutral international force" to eradicate M23, the FDLR and other armed groups in the region (Daily Monitor [Kampala], July 16; AFP, July 15). [1] The idea was then endorsed by the African Union. As of yet, however, potential contributors to this force have not been identified. Meetings on this issue are planned for Kampala at an August 6-7 summit of Great Lakes states (Agence Rwandaise d'Information, July 16). In the meantime, there are reports that the Rwanda Defence Forces (RDF) and the Congolese troops of the FARDC have agreed to mount joint patrols along their common border (Africa Review, July 17). Plagued by indiscipline, FARDC is often viewed as nearly as great a threat to Congolese security as the militias it is supposed to be fighting.

In mid-July, roughly two dozen M23 fighters deserted and surrendered to UN forces, saying they had been recruited in Rwanda and sent to the DRC. However, when the UN took these individuals to the Rwandan border for repatriation, Rwandan authorities refused to accept them, saying there was no evidence they were Rwandan nationals. Rwanda did accept the return of seven members of the Hutu FDLR (AFP, July 15). The ICC issued a warrant this month for FDLR commander Sylvestre Mudacumura, a Rwandan Hutu facing nine counts of war crimes.

Much of the community in Nord-Kivu views the ongoing violence in the region through a prism of tribal rivalries. With M23 being composed largely of Tutsis, senior members of the DRC's ruling party have used public rallies broadcast on state TV to threaten to hunt down all Tutsis in the DRC and send them to Rwanda. Street children and taxi drivers in Goma have used such threats as a license to attack anyone

who looks like a Tutsi (IRIN [Nairobi], July 14).

#### Note

1. The ICGLR is composed of 11 states: Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia.

### **“AMAN WITH NO LIMITS OR RESTRICTIONS”: NEW REVELATIONS FROM THE COURT OF MU’AMMAR GADDAFI**

According to a former Libyan official who was intimately acquainted with Mu’ammarr Gaddafi’s personal and political affairs, “Al-Gaddafi was a man with no limits or restrictions; he did anything he wished. He was tyrannical and arrogant. He thought that no one had the right to take him to account about anything.” The revelations emerged in a five-part interview by a pan-Arab daily of Nuri al-Mismari, a former state protocol secretary with the rank of minister of state (al-Hayat, July 15; July 17; July 18; July 19). Al-Mismari was in Gaddafi’s inner circle of aides and retainers, a position that gave him unique access to the personal and state secrets of the Gaddafi regime, secrets that would later place his life in jeopardy before he split from the regime in 2010.

The chief protocol officer says he was frequently imprisoned by Gaddafi, who would also occasionally punch him in the face. After leaving for France after being tipped off about a plot to murder him, al-Mismari claims he was told by other officials that Gaddafi was “preparing a basin of acid to drown me in as soon as I returned.” After Libya failed in its attempt to extradite al-Mismari, it sent an assassination team. The former Libyan official was placed in protective custody until the would-be assassins left France. There followed a procession of individuals trying to persuade al-Mismari to return to Libya, including the Libyan ambassador to France, members of al-Mismari’s family and even a personal visit from Gaddafi’s son, Mutassim al-Gaddafi (later killed in captivity after his capture during the October, 2011 Battle of Sirte).

Al-Mismari shed new light on the 1978 disappearance of Musa Sadr, the influential Iranian-born founder of the Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya (AMAL – Lebanese Resistance Detachments) and two companions while visiting Libya. Libya has long claimed the three men left Libya for Italy, but Italian officials insist the men never entered the country (see Terrorism Monitor Brief, September 22, 2011). According to al-Mismari, former Libyan intelligence chief Abdallah al-Sanusi (then a junior intelligence officer) asked the chief

of protocol to obtain Italian visas for the passports of Imam Musa al-Sadr and his two companions. Al-Mismari claims that Libyan intelligence took advantage of the lax inspection routine for those travelling under diplomatic passports by sending a military intelligence officer to Italy who resembled the Imam and who wore al-Sadr’s clothing. The officer then returned to Libya using his own diplomatic passport while the passports of the missing men were left in a hotel room in Italy to be discovered by authorities, leaving the Gaddafi regime with documented “proof” that Imam al-Sadr and his companions had left Libya for Italy.

Regarding the September, 1989 bombing of UTA Flight 772 over Niger that killed 156 passengers and 15 crew members, al-Mismari confirmed the account of former Libyan foreign minister Abd al-Rahman Shalgham, who said a year ago that the bombing was part of a Libyan intelligence plot to kill opposition leader Muhammad al-Maqrif (who turned out to not be on the plane) (al-Hayat, July 18, 2011). Al-Mismari adds that Libyan officials also thought the plane was carrying a number of leading Chadian officials, including President Hissène Habrè. Abdallah al-Sanusi and five other Libyans were tried and convicted in absentia in a French court in 1999 for their role in the bombing. The missing men are believed to have been killed on Gaddafi’s orders and buried in the desert near Sirte.

Despite his efforts to establish close relations with a host of African nations, Gaddafi privately mocked their heads of state, especially those who proved particularly fawning: “Al-Gaddafi loved to scorn and insult heads of state. He would say ‘bring me the black man’ - meaning the head of state of an African country - who was preparing to meet with him. When this head of state would leave, al-Gaddafi would say ‘the black man has left, give him something.’”

According to al-Mismari, Gaddafi liked to humiliate others by sleeping with their wives. His sadistic proclivities often resulted in scandalous situations that the protocol chief and others were forced to tidy up through large cash payments or the granting of government contracts. Gaddafi was also “terribly sexually deviant... young boys and so on... They used to be called the ‘services group.’ All of those were boys, bodyguards and harem for his pleasure.” Gaddafi would “indulge his debaucheries” in a vast underground residence at the Bab al-Zawiyah compound in Tripoli. According to al-Mismari, Gaddafi was advised on matters of virility by Italian president Silvio Berlusconi and was well supplied with pills by his intelligence chief and brother-in-law Abdallah al-Sanusi “to raise his morale and make him feel brave and strong.” Of the latter, al-Mismari remarks: “He was gentle, generous, respectful to your face. But he was bloodthirsty

and carried out the orders of his master.” Al-Sanusi, who is believed to have carried out the 1996 Abu Salim prison massacre of 1,200 suspected Islamists and other prisoners, is now in Mauritanian custody where he faces charges of illegal entry. Libya, France, Scotland and the ICC are all interested in his extradition to face charges in various cases of terrorism and political violence (Reuters, May 21).

Having been present at all state occasions during his time as protocol chief, al-Mismari had a number of observations to offer regarding Gaddafi’s relations with various world leaders:

- Gaddafi hated Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, “cursing him and calling him petty, stupid and reckless.” Gaddafi backed the Iraqi opposition while Saddam supported Gaddafi’s enemies in Chad.
- Gaddafi appears to have been infatuated with former American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice: “He invited her to dinner, and when she entered his private suite, she saw her portrait in a frame, hanging on a wall in his suite. When she saw it, she was shocked.” Gaddafi lavished gifts on Rice worth over \$212,000, including a diamond ring and a locket with Gaddafi’s picture in it. When rebels seized Gaddafi’s compound in August, 2011, they discovered a photo album full of pictures of the Secretary of State (CBS, August 25, 2011).
- Gaddafi was fond of referring to presidents and kings alike as “my son,” including U.S. president Barack Obama: “He used to do that on purpose in order to belittle people. We used to beg him not to say ‘My Son’ when addressing leaders.”
- Gaddafi was especially arrogant in his visits to Leonid Brezhnev in the Soviet Union: “[Gaddafi] would set an appointment then be deliberately late. Then, Brezhnev would go and wait for him outside his room at the Kremlin until he came out. It was embarrassing. Brezhnev was old and he could barely walk. Gaddafi would say that he was coming and Brezhnev would wait and wait.”
- Gaddafi liked to summon visiting leaders in the middle of the night, including Nelson Mandela: “[Gaddafi] told me to get dressed and to fetch Mandela, who was visiting Libya after having left the post of president. I spoke to Mandela’s adviser and he said: “Are you insane? The man is asleep and he is sick and his knees hurt.” I told him: “these are the instructions.” He said: “What kind of instructions? Do you think that Mandela is an employee

of yours? I will not allow anyone to wake him up.”

- When UN Secretary Kofi Annan visited Tripoli to discuss the Lockerbie bombing Gaddafi had him brought to his tent at night by a circuitous route through the desert, though the tent was only 200 meters from the coastal road. When he finally reached the tent, Annan was genuinely alarmed by the bellowing of camels in the pitch black night, which he took for the roar of lions.
- Though Egypt is a far larger and more important country than Libya, Gaddafi never regarded Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as his equal. During an Arab summit meeting, Gaddafi wore white gloves to avoid directly shaking Mubarak’s hand. Mubarak was also once forced to visit Gaddafi in his desert tent, but said afterwards: “If there’s a desert next time, then I will not go to Libya.”

## A Challenge for Pakistan: Saudi Arabia’s New Counterterrorism Cooperation with India

*Animesh Roul*

At a time when questions are being raised about Saudi Arabia’s tacit support for the global Salafist movement, recent developments have displayed the Kingdom’s new-found seriousness in fighting terrorism, especially that emanating from South Asia. These developments include the deportation of a top Lashkar- e-Taiba (LeT) operative and the detention of a wanted Indian Mujahideen (IM) suspect.

After a long period in custody, Saudi authorities deported Syed Zabihuddin Ansari (a.k.a. Abu Jundal) to India on June 22. Ansari is a top ranking Indian operative in the LeT and one of the key conspirators in the November, 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. The deportation itself brings a much needed breakthrough in the otherwise slow-paced Mumbai terror attack investigation.

Ansari was holed up in Saudi Arabia since 2010 after fleeing Pakistan, possibly with the help of his Pakistani handlers. To the embarrassment of Pakistan’s government, Ansari’s Pakistani passport indicates that it was issued in January 2009 from Karachi in the name of Riyasat Ali, a resident of Muridke, Pakistan. Ansari also holds two Pakistani identity cards that enable him to enter Pakistan without a visa.

In response to an Interpol alert, Saudi security agencies announced in mid-May that suspected IM operative Fasih Mehmood was detained in Jubail for his involvement in subversive activities in India (Times of India [New Delhi], July 4). Fasih, an engineer by profession, is wanted in India for his alleged involvement in the Chinnaswamy Stadium blasts in Bangalore (April 17, 2010) and the shooting of a tourist bus at Old Delhi's Jama Masjid (September 19, 2010). Indian agencies are presently seeking Fasih's deportation through diplomatic channels, though there have been some regulatory bottlenecks delaying his extradition (IBN Live, July 12; Deccan Chronicle [Hyderabad], July 18).

The visible shift in Indo-Saudi bilateral ties in the diplomatic sphere can be traced to the January 2006 Memorandum of Understanding on combating terrorism (part of the larger "Delhi Declaration") signed by then Indian Home Minister Shivraj Patil and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Sa'ud al-Faizal bin Abdul Aziz al-Sa'ud (Press Trust of India [New Delhi], January 25, 2006). The much needed extradition treaty was finally signed in late February 2010, furthering bilateral security cooperation under the auspices of the March, 2010 Riyadh Declaration (Times of India, March 1, 2010).

Riding on this new wave of counterterrorism cooperation from Saudi Arabia, India is attempting to target other Indian terrorist fugitives currently holed up in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region, including former leaders of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) and LeT operatives such as C.A.M. Basheer and Abu Haroon.

The arrest and deportation of Ansari, who was sent by his LeT handlers to Saudi Arabia on a mission to mobilize resources for the next big attack against India, certainly signals a new phase of Indo-Saudi anti-terrorism cooperation, even though it took months of diplomatic negotiations (with the United States playing an active role) to persuade Saudi authorities to overcome their long standing pro-Pakistan policies. Indeed, the latest policy shift goes against the Kingdom's old ally Pakistan in many ways. Ansari now becomes the third living proof of Pakistan's complicity in the Mumbai attacks, along with Ajmal Kasab and David Headley. It also sends a strong message to Pakistan that the Kingdom is no longer a safe haven or staging point for Islamic extremists who use the country to exploit both Salafist sympathizers and the South Asian diaspora to raise funds and to scout talent for jihad.

India is concerned about Saudi Arabia's largesse towards the Islamic madrassas and charity organizations that have contributed to Salafist-Jihadi extremism in South Asian

countries. Saudi Arabia has also been at the center of controversy over its support for Kashmir-centric charities and LeT fronts like Jama'at-ud-Dawa (JuD) in the name of health and educational aid. Even Saudi Arabia's legitimate banking institutions are now being closely watched by authorities in the United States, India and Bangladesh for facilitating transactions and hosting accounts of Indian-centric Pakistan-based terrorist groups and charities.

However, the change of heart on the part of the Saudi authorities is not directly related to U.S. pressure. Saudi Arabia well understands the dynamics of the changing geopolitical atmosphere in the Arab world and India's growing clout in the world stage. It also appreciates the fact that terrorism is a double-edged sword, especially following the August 2009 suicide attack on Prince Muhammad bin Nayef in Jeddah (al-Jazeera [Doha], August 28, 2009).

Ansari's deportation to India is the first of its kind by Saudi Arabia, though some observers in India fear it will also be the last. India expects the deportation of IM's Fasih Mehmood in the near future once Saudi officials have confirmed he is an Indian national. However, even if these are steps in the right direction, Saudi authorities have conveyed to their Indian counterparts that while they may be prepared to extradite Indian nationals to India, they wouldn't necessarily act against Pakistan nationals wanted for terrorist acts in India. India clearly cannot take Saudi cooperation for granted and will still need to work closely with Saudi authorities to ensure future cooperation.

A change is nonetheless visible in the Saudi attitude towards India as it reciprocates India's willingness to stand by the Kingdom in matters of trade and security. However, it is premature to expect Saudi Arabia to change its approach towards Pakistan vis-à-vis India. In the light of existing conditions, India might work in tandem with Saudi authorities to further a crackdown on the financial institutions and wealthy Saudi individuals who have channeled billions of petro-dollars under the name of Da'wa contributions to fund jihad across South Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Maldives or India.

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## Piracy on the Rise in the Gulf of Guinea as Niger Delta Militants Move Offshore

*Mark McNamee*

While the threat of piracy has gained international recognition off the coast of Somalia and farther out into the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, pirate activities in the Gulf of Guinea have only recently caught the world's attention. According to the UN's International Maritime Organization (IMO), 64 incidents of piracy were reported in nine countries of the Gulf of Guinea region in 2011, up from 45 incidents in seven countries in 2010 (Ghanian Chronicle, May 15). However, one of the defining features of West African piracy is its considerable underreporting, leading most analysts to believe that the level of attacks is in fact significantly higher than is officially reported (AP, March 29). It is widely believed that pirate activity, when unreported events are included, has reached levels similar to those experienced off Somalia's coast, which in turn has seen a recent decline in pirate activity. Attacks in the Gulf of Guinea have been on the rise for several years, especially following the 2009 of members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The independent criminal gangs responsible for the piracy are composed mainly of former Nigerian rebels that joined the criminal ranks following the amnesty (African Confidential, October 21, 2011). In the opinion of many, the amnesty served largely to benefit the MEND leadership, leaving those in the lower ranks desperate for economic opportunities and open to recruitment for pirate operations.

The surge in attacks has been concentrated in the Gulf of Guinea off the coast of Nigeria and Benin and has naturally led to mounting concern in the shipping industry. In August 2011, maritime insurers in London added the waters of Nigeria and Benin to a list of areas perceived as high risk as a result of increased pirate attacks in the Gulf. According to the International Maritime Bureau, there were 32 piracy incidents recorded off the coasts of Benin, Nigeria, and Togo in the first half of 2012, up from the 25 attacks reported in 2011. [1] After reporting that West Africa had become a piracy "hotspot," an IMB official further noted that this uptick likely does not reflect an actual increase in attacks but merely better reporting (AllAfrica.com, September 15, 2011; News24 [Lagos], July 18, 2012). In a worrying sign, pirate activity has occurred over the past year in Beninese and Togolese waters where no incidents were reported in 2010 or in early 2011. While attacks have traditionally centered

off the coast of Nigeria's Niger Delta, the waters of Benin and Togo have become increasingly risky because of these nations' weak enforcement capabilities, leading former MEND rebels-turned-pirates to shift their operations away from Nigeria's comparably better patrolled waters. Moreover, the pirates have taken their activities to deeper waters, mirroring attacks by their Somali counterparts.

Attacks in West Africa generally target tankers along with oilfield service and support vessels. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has escalated over the years from low-level armed robberies to hijackings, cargo thefts, and large-scale robberies. Unlike Somali piracy, the attackers have not been driven by ransom payments. Pirates often take hijacked tankers to another empty tanker to collect its siphoned fuel to be sold on the black market. The original vessel is then brought back and released. In a prominent incident highlighting this method, armed pirates boarded a tanker on September 14, 2011, kidnapping 23 sailors off the coast of Benin about 62 nautical miles from the Beninese port of Cotonou, one of the farthest offshore seizures ever recorded in West Africa. The pirates sailed to an unknown location and released the crew unharmed ten days later after having unloaded its cargo of oil (AP, October 11, 2011; September 14, 2011). Benin's underequipped patrol force was hours away and powerless to intervene.

The territorial waters of Nigeria and Cameroon have traditionally served as the focus of piracy in West Africa, driven in part by Nigeria's oil assets. The International Maritime Bureau warned ships to "steer clear of waters off Nigeria" after a trio of piracy attacks that occurred in early February, including a deadly assault on the master and chief engineer of a cargo vessel who were shot and killed by pirates about 90 nautical miles south of Lagos (AFP, February 27). The other attacks included a tanker that was briefly hijacked and a thwarted attack on an international shipping vessel (Vanguard [Lagos], February 13). Meanwhile, thanks to the increased focus of the Cameroonian Navy since 2010, there has been a decline in incidents in Cameroonian waters, which is believed to have pushed pirates westward, resulting in a marked increase in piracy precisely since that time in Benin and Togo. [2]

Ostensibly, attacks declined in Nigeria's waters in 2009 and 2010 thanks to a security crackdown in its waters and a general amnesty granted to southern rebels in 2009. However, it is believed that the lower levels of pirate attacks are more attributable to significant underreporting since the amnesty. [3] An IMB official has cited government pressure as a possible reason for this under-reporting (News24 [Lagos],

July 18). In addition, the victims of the attacks themselves have an incentive to not report an incident in order to avoid the resultant higher insurance premiums. Whatever the precise number of pirate incidents, piracy is inflicting a significant economic toll on the region. The nations of the Gulf of Guinea are reportedly losing \$2 billion annually to maritime crime, according to the Nigerian Navy (This Day [Lagos], February 23). Moreover, Benin saw a 70% decrease in the past year in the number of ships entering its main port of Cotonou, which carries 90% of Benin's trade, representing 80% of the government's budget. Cotonou is a critical port for landlocked nations to the north, according to the Minister of State in Charge of National Defense in Benin. [4]

As in Somalia, the future of West African piracy in the long term depends on the security and economic situation on the mainland. It will be impossible to achieve substantive improvements in the fight against piracy through purely defensive tactics on the open sea. For real improvement, the benefits of legitimate economic pursuits on the mainland would have to outweigh the benefits of piracy for would-be buccaneers.

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#### Notes:

1. According to the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) Global Piracy Report, released on July 16, 2012, <http://www.icc-ccs.org/news/747-six-month-drop-in-world-piracy-imb-report-shows>.
2. Comments by U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Susan Rice at a Security Council Debate on Piracy and Maritime Armed Robbery in the Gulf of Guinea, as reported in AllAfrica.com, February 27, 2012.
3. IMB Global Piracy Report, op cit.
3. United Nations Security Council Meeting, February 27, 2012, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sc10558.doc.htm>

## Between Electoral Politics and Global Jihad: Libya's Islamist Groups Consider New Options

*Dario Cristiani*

The performance of the Islamist parties was particularly poor in the recent Libyan elections. The National Forces Alliance (NFA), led by former interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, won the elections, securing 39 out of the 80 seats open for candidates representing political parties. The Hizb al-Adala wa'l-Bina (HAB - Justice and Development Party), launched by Libya's Muslim Brotherhood, came in second with 17 seats. The Islamist al-Watan Party, led by ex-jihadist and former rebel commander Abd al-Hakim Belhadj, won no seats at all (al-Jazeera, July 18; The Press Association, July 18). These results do not say much about the future political orientation of the Libyan parliament, as that will depend largely on the profiles of the 120 independent candidates provided for by the new Libyan electoral law.

One of the causes of the Islamists' electoral difficulties was the fragmentation of the Islamist camp (al Jazeera, July 18). While many Islamist players decided to run for election within the legal guidelines, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Watan, some others – above all in eastern Libya – remain in the grey area between political activism and militant action. Most notably, a new group has emerged in eastern Libya over the past few months, called “the Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman Brigade” (named for the Egyptian Sheikh imprisoned in the United States for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing). The movement's focus on global jihad against “the far enemy” is similar to that of many other jihadist groups, but is somewhat of a novelty in Libya, where jihadists have adopted a more national focus.

### Post-Gaddafi Developments

Islamist groups in Libya supported the revolution from its beginning. The allegedly good relations built by some Islamist leaders with the former regime in the last phase of its existence did not prevent them from joining the revolution. After decades of clashes, relations with the regime had improved mainly as a result of the policy of reintegrating fighters of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) promoted by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. The son of the former Libyan leader insisted that the LIFG had to stop pursuing armed rebellion in Libya and turn the focus of their jihad from the West to Palestine, the only place such activity was acceptable (Turess.com [Tunis], March 25, 2010). However, Mu'ammarr

Gaddafi's ruthless repression of the early revolts in Benghazi pushed the members of these groups to embrace the cause of the revolution and reject the late call by the regime to act as mediator with local revolutionary groups. This decision pushed Islamist players to act more pragmatically as they accepted Western and NATO support to overthrow Gaddafi.

Ex LIFG fighters were soon numbered amongst the most important players in the revolution. These fighters, above all those who had gained previous experience in other war theaters such as Afghanistan, the Balkans, the northern Caucasus and Iraq, were particularly efficient and effective in carrying out military operations. Their capabilities stood in contrast to the widespread lack of military and operational experience of other Libyan revolutionaries, who were often simple civilians who had joined a brigade. Indeed, Belhadj and his fellow militiamen led the successful assault on Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziyah compound in August 2011, signaling the de-facto end of the regime.

However, during and after the revolution, the Libyan Islamist camp was anything but truly united and cohesive. Similar to the wider, national dynamic of forced unity against the common Gaddafi threat, several Islamist groups made a strategic decision to overcome their differences, joining the wider consensus of the revolutionary front.

### **An al-Qaeda Connection?**

During the early stages of the revolution, a group named the "Islamic Emirate of Barqah" emerged. Barqah is the ancient Arabic name for the region of Cyrenaica (eastern Libya). Gaddafi's forces claimed that al-Qaeda members had established an Islamic emirate in Derna, a well-known traditional and conservative city in northeastern Libya. Led by Abdelkarim al-Hasadi, the emirate was allegedly responsible for the kidnapping of civilians and members of security forces in the town of al-Baida (al-Arabiya, February 23, 2011; AFP, February 20, 2011). However, the existence of this group seemed to be an attempt by Gaddafi's regime to blame al-Qaeda-related forces for launching the revolution and to use these developments as a tool to apply pressure against Western countries.

While it is true that there were several Islamist cells active in the east of Libya during the revolution, their links with al-Qaeda central are questionable. In the history of Libyan jihadism there are two clear patterns of development: one characterized by a global orientation and symbolized by Abu Yahya al-Libi, and a more nationally-oriented struggle, whose major figure was Belhadj. Although Belhadj and several other ex-LIFG fighters had a past of international

jihadist involvement, they were generally more focused on fighting against the internal enemy and fled Libya only when the situation proved to be unsustainable for them. However, their presence among the revolutionary ranks could not be considered proof that al-Qaeda was part of the revolution.

In the west of the country, Belhadj and his group represented the most important Islamist players. In the east, the most important Islamist group was the February 17 Brigade, based in Benghazi and with ties to former LIFG members as well as members of Libya's Harakat al-Shuhada'a al-Islamiyah (Islamic Martyrs Movement). The leader of the February 17 Brigade was Imam Ismail al-Sallabi, described on the forum of the Muslim Brotherhood as the younger brother of Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi, a Libyan Muslim cleric and religious scholar with extensive relations in the Gulf peninsula. Ali Muhammad was also one of the major counterparts of Saif al-Islam in the program of reintegration of Islamist fighters in Libya (Reuters, September 20, 2011; Ikhwan.net, September 9, 2011). Following the death of Gaddafi and the end of the revolution, many of these Islamist players decided to turn to politics, while some other small groups, mainly in eastern Libya, remain without a clear political agenda, divided between militancy and political activism.

A major development in the evolution of the jihad movement in Libya occurred when the Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman Brigade claimed responsibility for the rocket attacks on the Benghazi headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in late May (Libya Herald, June 3). A few days later, the group also claimed responsibility for the attack against the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, claiming that it was a response to the killing by a U.S. drone of Abu Yahya al-Libi, al-Qaeda's number two and probably the most notable intellectual and ideological figure of the global movement (AFP, June 11). [1] The features of this group closely resemble those of other jihadist movements and are of particular interest for the future configuration of the Islamist and jihadist camp in Libya.

### **Three Possible Directions for Libya's Islamists: National, Regional, Global**

The Muslim Brotherhood and the former leadership of the LIFG have decided to place themselves within the legal and formal political landscape, accepting the rule of the democratic game and running in the election. Similar to what has happened in Tunisia following the overthrow of Ben Ali and the Ennahada "centrist normalization," with the emergence of several more radical Islamist and Salafist players who want to exploit the availability of this new political space on the right side of Ennahada, in Libya the

participation of Islamist groups in the normal representative political game has opened up space for other, more radical Islamist players. These new opportunities can be exploited in several, different ways:

- First of all, there is the *national option*, the possibility for Islamist players outside the limits of normal parliamentary politics to use political Islam as a narrative of discontent and revolution within the national political environment. For instance, this narrative may merge with the rising separatist sentiment in eastern Libya, especially if the feeling of marginalization in these areas of the country should increase.
- The *regional option* is the possibility for Libyan radical Islamist players to get involved more deeply in the current jihadist dynamics characterizing the Maghrebi-Sahelian space. Indeed, the enormous availability of weapons and the lucrative illegal trafficking in contraband associated with this area make this option strategically interesting, although relations between the Libyan jihadists and other regional jihadists are not that strong. For instance, the Libyan presence in the ranks of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is generally considered to be insignificant, not more than 50 men. More likely, there could be occasional interaction between some Libyan militants and members of the different jihadist movements now operating in the Sahelian space, such as the already mentioned AQIM, Ansar al-Din and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA). These relationships will more likely be based on common logistic and business interests rather than on a unified jihadist vision with common enemies, targets and strategies. While the Islamist movements have presented a united front in public, there are rumors of emerging differences between the militant groups based on divergent strategic aims. Therefore, collaboration is possible but is unlikely to be structural.
- Finally, there is the *global option*. In some ways, the Sheikh Omar Abd al-Rahman Brigades already operate within these conceptual boundaries. The reference in the movement's name to a major international jihadist leader, the specific choice of the operational targets – the Red Cross and the U.S. consulate – and the declared rationale of these attacks – respectively the accusation that the Red Cross was engaged in Christian proselytization and revenge for the killing of al-Libi – put this group more directly in the wake of the wider global al-Qaeda movement (Libya Herald, June 3; Tripoli Post, June 12). Al-Qaeda considered as a whole is facing a period of transition following the death of its founder

and leader Osama bin Laden. However, its borderless and comprehensive concept of jihad where the fight against the far enemy– the U.S. and the impious Western countries in general – is more important than one against the near/national enemies seems to characterize this form of Libyan jihadism. In a way, this new focus on global jihad could represent a novelty in the Islamist jihad field in Libya as Libyan jihadists were generally focused specifically on national struggle against the near enemy rather than on the global struggle against the far enemy.

## Conclusion

It is likely that it will not be possible to draw clear conceptual and operational boundaries between these three options – national, regional, and global – and there may thus be a type of dynamic interaction between these options rather than a unitary trajectory for Libya's radical Islamists. However, it is worth noting that a new group in the east, the Shaykh Omar Abd al-Rahman Brigade, is acting according to more general al-Qaeda precepts, primarily attacking targets associated with the far enemy and finding motivation in issues not strictly associated with the ongoing political situation in Libya. For Libya's radical Islamist fighters, turning to the national option is a realistic and likely option, especially if eastern Libya continues to have little political weight in the national political balance. However, the emergence of the global option will be of particular interest and needs to be monitored closely, particularly if security stabilization in Libya should fail or proceed much slower than expected.

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## Note

1. See Michael W.S. Ryan, "The Death of Abu Yahya al-Libi and its Impact on al-Qaeda Strategy, Priorities and Goals, Jamestown Foundation *Hot Issue*, June 15, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=39499&cHash=2402c33ec186fb31aa4b9da6a03f4dff](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39499&cHash=2402c33ec186fb31aa4b9da6a03f4dff)