

Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

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SOMALIA: PRO-IS FIGHTERS EXPLOIT CLAN LOYALTIES

Alexander Sehmer

Islamic State-linked (IS) militants took over the port town of Qandala in Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland region early on October 26, apparently facing little resistance ([Shabelle News](#), October 26). Qandala is a strategic target, a hub for smuggled weapons brought into Somalia from the Yemeni port of Mukalla. The fighters, possibly anticipating a strong response from the authorities, appear to have partially retreated the following day ([Garowe](#), October 27). Whether temporary or not, the advance is significant as it marks the first time the IS faction has made any sizeable territorial gains in Somalia.

The group is led by [Sheikh Abdulkadir Mumin](#), a Somali-born British jihadist who preached at mosques in London before returning to Somali in 2010 to fight with al-Shaabaab. He split with the al-Qaeda-linked group in 2015, swearing allegiance to IS leader Abubakr al-Baghdadi and

causing ructions within al-Shabaab, which subsequently tried to stamp out the breakaway group ([Garowe](#), December 24, 2015).

Mumin's faction has since been able to make ground by taking advantage of a political dispute in Bari, the Puntland province where Qandala is located.

In May last year, Abdisamad Mohamed Gallan, Bari's then governor, was sacked by President Abdiweli Mohamed Ali ([Horseed Media](#), May 27, 2015). Since then Gallan, a member of the Ali Salebaan clan, has launched his own small insurgency, leading his supporters in clashes with government forces ([Hiiraan](#), June 23). According to the UN Monitoring Group report on Somalia, Gallan is backed by Mumin, also a member of Ali Salebaan clan ([United Nations](#), October 31).

The report links both men to fellow clan-member Isse Mohamoud Yusuf, an arms dealer known as "Yullux" who plies the Mukalla-Qandala smuggling route.

The Ali Salebaan have long felt marginalized by the Puntland government, and Qandala falls within their heartland. Access to the port – which the pro-IS faction has effectively demonstrated – potentially gives Mumin access to greater resources, while clan connections afford him some protection and Puntland’s government remains distracted by Gallan’s insurgency.

The move on Qandala is also something of a propaganda victory for Mumin, whose group remains relatively small in the grand scheme. Rivals al-Shabaab remain by far a greater threat in East Africa (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), December 1), and Mumin’s faction has yet to win any public endorsement from al-Baghdadi. Nonetheless, that may come. As long as Gallan’s insurgency remains uncontained, Mumin’s faction will likely have greater room to maneuver. More territorial gains by his group – and propaganda victories – can be expected.

NIGERIA: BOKO HARAM ATTACKS SHOW MILITANTS FAR FROM DEFEAT

Alexander Sehmer

The release of 21 of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls in Nigeria last month, apparently without any concession from the government, was seen as an indication Boko Haram was on the ropes. However, a series of successful recent attacks and the killing of a high-profile military officer has poured cold water on government claims the group has been brought to its knees ([Guardian \[Nigeria\]](#), October 14).

On November 4, Boko Haram fighters killed Lieutenant Colonel Muhammed Abu-Ali, along with four of his men in an ambush during fighting at Mallam Fatori in Borno State ([Premium Times](#), November 5). Abu-Ali was widely celebrated in Nigeria as a hero of the country’s counter-terrorism efforts, and his death prompted tributes from political and military figures ([Premium Times](#), November 6). A separate ambush just days later killed another commander, Lieutenant Colonel BU Umar, although in that case the military delayed releasing details of the incident ([Premium Times](#), November 24).

In May the Nigerian military launched “Operation Crackdown” in a bid to clear the Sambisa forest of Boko Haram fighters and rescue the Chibok schoolgirls ([This Day](#), May 3). Nearly eight months later, however, the offensive is still under way, hampered by the dense vegetation of the forest, Boko Haram’s better knowledge of the terrain and the poor state of the Nigerian armed forces.

The military was the focus of recent criticism by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who blasted them as corrupt, poorly equipped and run by “cruel and unpatriotic” commanders who turn their men out to face Boko Haram without adequate resources ([Nigerian Bulletin](#), November 23). Even allowing for the politicking of Nigeria’s former leader, who feels his own administration’s achievements have been overlooked by President Muhammadu Buhari, the picture he paints of the Nigerian military is not wholly inaccurate.

Sensitive to the recent setbacks, and ahead of Obasanjo’s public rebuke, the military has tried to bolster confidence. The air force has released footage of its fighter

jets striking Boko Haram targets in Goni Kurmi, while the chief of defense staff, General Abayomi Olonisakin, briefed journalists about military successes while inspecting newly acquired military vehicles ([The Nation](#), October 11; [Guardian \[Nigeria\]](#), November 21).

Even so, the killing of the high-profile Abu-Ali is a blow to the government's efforts and contradicts President Buhari's claim – now nearly a year ago – that Boko Haram was “technically defeated” ([BBC](#), December 24, 2015). Even with an ideological split that has divided the militants in recent months, Boko Haram continues to be a serious threat (see [Terrorism Monitor](#), August 19). It will take more than media statements to bring a successful end to the Sambisa forest operation.

Egypt's Policies Entrench the Islamist Threat

Muhammad Mansour

At a time when Islamic State (IS) is losing ground in Syria and Iraq, its Sinai franchise dealt a blow to the Egyptian armed forces stationed in Sinai. On October 14, the group attacked an army checkpoint in restive North Sinai, killing 12 soldiers and injuring six others in the deadliest attack on Egyptian security forces this year ([al-Ahram](#), October 14). The militants attacked with assault rifles, under the covering fire of heavier weapons including mortar rounds and rockets ([al-Masry al-Youm](#), October 14). A statement from the Egyptian military described the incident: "An armed group of terrorist elements attacked a security checkpoint in North Sinai this morning using four-wheel drive [vehicles] and were immediately engaged. Our forces killed 15 terrorists."

The next day, IS published images of the attack – distributed via Telegram and Twitter – and claimed that over 20 members of the security forces had been killed. In the following days, the Egyptian military launched air raids on IS hideouts in Sinai and intensified its counter-terrorism campaign in the area. In a subsequent clash, eight soldiers were killed and 11 others wounded according to reports ([al-Masry al-Youm](#), October 16).

Military action, however, has had only limited success. The checkpoint attack came despite the military's repeated trumpeting of its own successes killing prominent IS figures. In early August, the Egyptian military announced an IS leader in Sinai identified as Abu Duaa al-Ansari had been killed, along with 45 militants, in an airstrike that targeted the group's strongholds in Sinai ([al-Arabiya](#), August 4).

The attack also stands out because the target – the checkpoint is 40 kilometers from the town of Bir al-Abd, west of al-Arish – is a considerable distance from known IS strongholds in Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah, adjacent to the Gaza Strip. These areas have been the main focus of IS operations since the 2013 coup that overthrew Egypt's Islamist former president Mohamed Morsi.

Islamist Attacks in Cairo

In the capital Cairo, Islamist militants have also been active. Eight days after the attack in Sinai, on October 22, two men on a motorbike targeted army general Adel Ragaie, shooting him dead in front of his house in Obour City, 35 kilometers north-east of Cairo ([al-Masry al-Youm](#), October 22).

An armed group identified as Liwa al-Thawra (Revolution Brigade), which the government has labeled a militant wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, claimed the attack in a message posted on Twitter that read: "A group of our fighters have liquidated the criminal Adel Ragaie, one of Sisi's militia leaders this morning, shooting him in the head with several bullets and taking his weapon" ([Twitter](#), October 22). The group also showed what it claimed were pictures of the assassination operation and later posted footage on YouTube purportedly showing the assassination ([Masrawy](#), November 14).

Liwa al-Thawra came into the spotlight in August when they claimed responsibility for attacking a group of policemen stationed at a checkpoint in Monofeya, located in the northern part of Egypt in the Nile Delta. The attack killed two soldiers and injured five other people, including two civilians, and marked the third anniversary of the August 2013 Rabaa massacre in which the security forces killed as many as 1,000 pro-Morsi protesters ([al-Watan](#), August 21).

Ragaie's killing constitutes a serious blow to Sisi – no military general was assassinated during the three-decade-long rule of President Hosni Mubarak, nor under the Islamists' brief spell in power. Ragaie was the head of the Ninth Armored Division and oversaw the destruction and flooding of tunnels that ran into the Gaza Strip under the Rafah border, which provided a lifeline for residents of the besieged territory ([al-Jazeera](#), October 23).

Cairo has witnessed several assassination attempts against Sisi's supporters. In late September, a senior prosecutor, Assistant Attorney General Zakaria Abd al-Aziz, survived a car bomb planted near his motorcade. Neither al-Aziz nor his escorts were injured in the blast, but a civilian who was close to the explosion was injured by shrapnel and was taken to a hospital for treatment. [1] In August, former Grand Mufti Ali Gomaa also survived an attempt on his life in Cairo's 6th of October City, when armed men opened fire on him on his way to a mosque to lead prayers ([al-Ahram](#), August 6).

Gomaa has been a vocal critic of Muslim Brotherhood and a staunch supporter of President Sisi. Furthermore, in 2013, he had blessed the violent dispersal of Rabaa and Nahada encampment in particularly virulent language, saying: "Shoot them in the heart ... Blessed are those who kill them, and those who are killed by them... We must cleanse our Egypt from these riffraff ... They shame us ... They stink. This is how God has created them." [2]

IS Militants Adapt

Three years after the coup that brought down Morsi, Egypt is struggling under the increasingly repressive policies of Sisi's administration and facing a rising terror threat from Islamist militants that has extended into Cairo.

At least 700 members of the police and army were killed between August 2013 and August 2015, according to a Carnegie study, as well as hundreds of civilians and militants. [3] The second half of 2015 witnessed a dramatic increase in terrorist operations, including the murder of the general prosecutor, Hisham Barkat, in June, and the IS Sinai Province's attempts to seize Sheikh Zuwait area, which left at least 35 soldiers dead, in July. There was also the attempted bombing of the Italian consulate in Cairo the same month, and the downing of a Russian aircraft in Sharm el-Sheikh in October, which resulted in the death of all 224 passengers and prompted the suspension of international flights to the resort town.

As the military campaign has intensified, IS militants in Sinai are changing tactics, resorting to roadside bombs in Arish, reports of which are now depressingly frequent in news bulletins. The Bir al-Abd attack, in the middle of Sinai, was ambitious, close as it was to the Suez Canal. In Cairo, assassination attempts by Islamists are aimed at breaking the morale of the security forces. IS has also inspired youth from other Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to operate in Cairo and the Nile Delta.

The increasing terror threat benefits Sisi as it provides the government with an excuse to sideline demands for reform – demands the administration's strong-arm tactics have already weakened to a degree – and puts the international community in a corner with little option but

to support Sisi's government without the usual rhetoric about respect for human rights.

Muhammad Mansour is a journalist and columnist who has covered the 'Arab Spring' uprisings and political transitions in their aftermath. He writes on geo-political, and socio-economic topics concerning the Middle East.

NOTES

[1] Interior Ministry statement (Facebook, September 29)

[2] Full speech can be found on ([YouTube](#), October 10, 2013)

[3] 'Egypt's Escalating Islamist Insurgency' ([Carnegie](#), October 21, 2015)

Kenya Struggles to Combat Al-Shabaab's Cross-Border Attacks

Sunguta West

Al-Shabaab has increased attacks in areas near the Kenyan border in recent months, as local and international military action pushes the al-Qaeda affiliated group out of its hideouts in southern Somalia. Analysts believe the militants now have bases in the north and northeastern regions of Mandera, Wajir and Garissa, with about 100 militants operating in the area ([Coast-week](#), September 2).

The movement of heavily armed fighters into small towns and villages along the Kenya-Somali border has been triggered by a sustained and relatively successful campaign from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), as well as an anticipated drought ([Intelligence Brief](#), October 17). But it may also be part of a strategy that was first articulated by the late al-Shabaab emir Shaykh Ahmed Abdi Godane, who sought to develop the group's wider regional ambitions.

Porous Borders

In two recent attacks in Mandera town, close to the border with Somalia and Ethiopia, militants have inflicted serious civilian casualties and been able to disappear back over the border as the security forces responded.

On October 25, al-Shabaab militants killed 12 people in Mandera in an attack on a local hotel. Arriving in the early morning, the militants used explosives to break into Bisharo Guest House in which non-Muslims were spending the night. The majority of those killed were quarry workers from central Kenya, but also among the dead were a number of actors from Nairobi who were on an educational tour ([The Standard](#), October 25). Kenyan security forces responded to the attack, but the gunmen escaped into Somalia.

Only a couple of weeks earlier, on October 5, militants killed six people in an attack on a residential compound in the town during which the gunmen used a grenade to break through the compound gates and chose victims at random. The security forces responded swiftly, accord-

ing to reports, and rescued nearly 25 people, but again the militants fled into Somalia ([The Star](#), October 6).

Engaging in a war of revenge, the militants have targeted civilians in the hopes of whipping up emotions and eroding public support for the Kenyan military presence in Somalia.

The fighters have also carried out hit-and-run attacks using grenades and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) on military convoys and camps, police stations and government installations.

In September, gunmen killed a police commander and two other officers along the Lafey-Elwak road in Mandera County, after hitting a police vehicle with a rocket-propelled grenade. The attack occurred hours after the police launched a manhunt for militants who had attempted to attack the military in the area ([Coastweek](#), September 2). Earlier, in April, the militants attacked a police station in Diff, a town center in Wajir County, located 10 kilometers from Somalia. The militants stole a police vehicle and ammunition and fled to across the border ([The Star](#), April 10).

Al-Hijra Network

In carrying out these attacks, al-Shabaab has allegedly relied on a local network of trusted agents and sympathizers it established over time in parts of Kenya. One element of the network is believed to be Jaysh al Ayman, a unit set up by Godane, al-Shabaab's late former leader, in 2012. The second is al-Hijra, formerly the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), which recruited its followers from the Majengo slums of Nairobi and the coastal city of Mombasa.

The group was formed by Ahmed Iman Ali, a Muslim preacher in Nairobi who fled to Somalia in 2009, and was led in the coastal region by Sheikh Aboud Rogo Mohammed, who was killed in 2012 when unidentified gunmen opened fire on his vehicle. ([The Star](#), July 20, 2013). His wife was also injured in the attack.

In 2012, the group announced its partnership with al-Shabaab and changed its name to al-Hijra, a reference to Prophet Mohammed's escape from the holy city of Mecca to Medina and is intended to represent its own followers' supposed religious persecution by the government ([Mareeg](#), July 28, 2013).

According to the security services, both al-Hijra and Jaysh al Ayman are active in Lamu County ([The Standard](#), December 24, 2015; [The Standard](#), February 28). Their operatives have been active in the Boni Forest, a dense woodland that straddles the Somali border in Lamu County. The forest's caves and dense vegetation has provided good cover for training camps and bases from which to launch attacks.

From the forest, the fighters have been able to launch attacks on towns and villages in Lamu County. The bloodiest was what is now known as the Mpeketoni Massacre in June 2014, in which militants killed more than 50 people ([Horseed Media](#), March 3, 2015).

Kenya's Response

Under pressure from the recent attacks and threatened by the build-up of militants on its border, Kenya has bolstered intelligence sharing with regional and international partners battling al-Shabaab. Additionally, it has scaled up patrols near the border region, reportedly boosting the number of police in the region ([Nep Journal](#) September 20).

In 2015, the government deployed the army into Boni Forest to destroy the militants' infrastructure and flush out al-Shabaab fighters hiding there. Dubbed Operation Linda Boni, the campaign has made the forest and the surrounding area more secure, but is a long way from eradicating the threat ([Daily Nation](#), May 23, 2016).

Meanwhile, in Nairobi and Mombasa, the government has utilized CCTV cameras and other modern technologies for surveillance. Earlier this year, Kenya purchased an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) known as ScanEagle from the United States at a cost of \$9.86 million, touted as one of Kenya's most significant counterterrorism purchases ([The EastAfrican](#), February 25).

New Approach Needed

The northern and coastal border regions are an easy location for the militants to operate due to their close proximity to war-torn Somalia. The areas are also remote, often hostile to the government and underdeveloped due to many years of neglect by Nairobi.

Yet, the upsurge in attacks may also be part of a long-term strategy, pegged on turning al-Shabaab into a regional terror organization, following Shaykh Godane's plan for the group before his death in 2013. The current emir, Sheikh Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah, recently called for a wave of attacks across East Africa ([e-NCA](#), July 17, 2015). He has threatened attacks in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Uganda. There are even suggestions the group has an eye on Tanzania ([IPPMedia](#), August 18).

As Kenya forces focus on neutralizing al-Shabaab in southern Somalia, the group's presence is slowly encroaching on East Africa's biggest economy. Evidently, a new counterterrorism approach is needed to stop the militant group's incursions along the border and end its presence in Kenya.

Sunguta West in an independent journalist based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Algeria's Role in Libya: Seeking Influence Without Interference

Dario Cristiani

Faced with a range of potential threats, Algeria is one of the countries most concerned with developments in Libya. Close adherence to a doctrine of non-interference has limited Algeria's role in its neighbor's affairs. However, when Fayed al-Sarraj, the president of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), paid a two-day visit to Algeria in October, Algiers concerns regarding Libya were strongly evident – chiefly the threat from Islamic State (IS), the potential for Libya to once again become a stronghold for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and regional relations with Egypt and Morocco.

On his arrival, Sarraj was welcomed by Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal; Abdelkader Messahel, Algeria's minister for Maghreb affairs, the African Union and Arab League; and Noureddine Bedoui, the minister for the interior and local government ([Algérie Presse Service](#), October 4). The presence of Sellal and Bedoui is an indication of what Algeria's priorities are in regards to Libya.

Sarraj also met Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The two reportedly discussed the situation in Libya and what Sarraj termed "Algeria's unfailing support to Libya in this challenging context." Moreover, the Libyan GNA president also highlighted the long-standing brotherly relations between the two countries, saying both were keen to obtain greater international support for their anti-terrorism efforts ([Algérie Presse Service](#), October 4).

Algeria's Concerns

Algiers has long been committed to a doctrine of non-interference and as such has been unwilling to support any external military intervention in Libya. The Algerian authorities have, over the past few years, shown a degree of flexibility in the application of this principle – for instance during the French-led intervention in Mali, or in tackling security problems in Tunisia ([El Watan](#), August 4, 2014). But in general, Algeria is unwilling to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, even when its own security is under threat. As a consequence, where

Libya is concerned, Algeria has remained committed to a political and negotiated solution, does not advocate military force and disapproves of other countries dictating Libya's political agenda. Algeria remains broadly committed to supporting the GNA. While the GNA may be feeble and has done little to strengthen its legitimacy in the eyes of many Libyans, the political methodology underlying its establishment – a negotiated outcome aimed at putting together different geographical and political sensibilities – fits with Algiers' foreign policy principles.

Nonetheless, Algeria is concerned about "spillover" from its neighbor. Sharing an almost 1,000 kilometer-long border, instability in Libya can quickly spread to Algeria, and Algiers is particularly concerned about the potential infiltration of Islamic State (IS) fighters. The IS defeat in Sirte, the group's Libyan stronghold, is expected to have a knock-on effect on regional security ([Reuters](#), October 4). Although the defeat in Sirte is a major symbolic blow to the organization, it is not the end of the IS presence in Libya. Many fighters have escaped to the western and southern parts of the country and may launch isolated guerrilla attacks, either in Libya or neighboring countries.

Wider regional security dynamics have contributed to Algeria's concerns. As the Iraqi government moves ahead with its military offensive to retake Mosul, Algerian commentators have expressed their fears that IS fighters will leave Iraq and head to Libya, strengthening the IS presence there ([L'Expression](#), October 20).

A second problem for Algeria is that Libya could again become a logistics platform for al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Indeed, IS does not represent the only terrorist threat for Algeria, nor is it, if analyzed historically, the most significant. For Algeria, AQIM still represents the most critical security threat to the country, although the group is now much weaker than it was a few years ago.

Even though many AQIM fighters have left Algeria over the past few years, the organization maintains a presence there – in October Algerian security forces killed Djamel Hanneb, a close associate of AQIM leader Abdelmalek Droukdel ([Jeune Afrique](#), October 7).

AQIM has shifted its geographical focus over the past few years, and its regional rivalry with IS has pushed the

organization to search for new jihadist "opportunities" in West Africa and the Sahel, launching a number of terrorist attacks in response to IS' increasingly prominent role in North Africa ([Terrorism Monitor](#), March 3). In this context, the weakening of IS in Libya represents a strategic opportunity for AQIM to return to the country, perhaps even re-establishing what was a significant presence in the immediate aftermath of the Libyan revolution. Algeria considers AQIM's presence in Libya a major threat. The In Amenas attack – to date the worst terrorist attack against the oil and gas industry in Algeria's history – is a powerful reminder of the potential threat. Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his group entered Algeria from Libya, and had planned and organized the attack while in the country ([Terrorism Monitor](#), January 25, 2013).

The third element of concern is the trafficking of weapons. While Libya has turned, more generally, into a regional hub for illicit goods – from narcotics and counterfeit medicines to cars and people – it is also a major regional hub for black market weapons ([Reuters](#), March 10, 2014). Small arms, coming from the Sahel and Sudan, enter Algeria and find their way into the hands of terrorist cells and criminal gangs in southern Algeria. In addition, heavy weapons, such as missiles, enter Algeria from Libya, as the security authorities discovered when they seized a consignment in El Oued that included missiles ([Jeune Afrique](#), September 22). In many cases, these trafficking operations are managed by regional jihadist organizations, an indication of the hybrid nature of these groups.

Looking Further Afield

Another significant element is the impact Libya's security crisis may have on neighboring Tunisia. Tunisia's stability is particularly important to Algeria, for security and economic reasons. The IS presence in Libya has had a direct impact on Tunisian security, with the three terrorist attacks that the country suffered in 2015 a demonstration of this dynamic.

Although Tunisia's new institutions have proven resilient to the threat, the security situation has had an adverse impact on the country's economy and increased the frustration of many citizens towards the authorities. If exacerbated, these problems might pose a threat to the Tunisian state, a development that Algeria would prefer to avoid and, with Algerians becoming one of the most important sources of Tunisian tourism, attacks on

Tunisian tourist destinations represent a direct threat to the safety of Algerian citizens ([Huffington Post Maghreb](#), August 5; [Jeune Afrique](#), August 13, 2015).

Given its lack of political will to interfere directly, Algeria has intervened in other ways to strengthen its security vis-a-vis Libya's increasing instability, primarily by increasing the capacity of its security forces on the borders ([Tout sur l'Algérie](#), March 10). The Algerian army now deploys South-African Seeker drones and Beechcraft 1900 planes for reconnaissance missions, and it uses sophisticated military night-vision goggles ([Jeune Afrique](#), September 22). In addition, in June 2016, Algeria announced the purchase of three Gulfstream G550 aircraft, which can carry out longer surveillance missions ([MenaDefense](#), June 16).

Algeria has also started to build a fence along its border with Libya and Tunisia, and it is doing the same on the frontier with Morocco ([Tout sur l'Algérie](#), August 31). However, the need to strengthen and invest additional resources in security comes at a time of deep economic crisis for Algeria, with the country struggling as a result of weakening oil prices and the lasting impact of the shale revolution ([El Watan](#), October 19). The re-emergence of a number of other oil-producing countries – Iran, as well as Libya itself – on the international market is likely to have a further negative impact on Algeria's public finances.

Domestic economic problems represent a key risk to Algeria's stability in the coming years ([Tout sur l'Algérie](#), January 23). This is particularly so given the country's relatively complicated transition period, but it will also affect Algeria's capacity to deal with the threat emanating from Libya ([Terrorism Monitor](#), May 2, 2014).

North African Relations and the Libyan Conflict

Libya's instability has a significant regional dimension that affects the international relations of Mediterranean Africa. This is particularly important for Algeria, as Libya's problems have a direct impact on Algeria's relations with two of its principal regional rivals – Egypt and Morocco.

Of the two, Egypt is by far the more involved in Libyan issues. Egypt remains the most important regional and international ally of General Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan National Army (LNA) chief, and has often expressed

views that diverge from those of Algeria regarding the crisis ([Terrorism Monitor](#), June 26, 2014). Haftar recently gave a lengthy interview to al-Ahram, which was a *de facto* public endorsement for Haftar by the Egyptian government given the importance of the newspaper. In the interview, Haftar praised Egypt and other countries, such as Russia and China, for the support they have provided him ([Al-Ahram](#), September 19). In addition, he stressed that France is increasingly cooperating with him in the wake of the November 2015 Paris attacks.

Haftar's is trying to present himself as the anti-IS bastion in Libya, despite the fact that the burden of the Sirte offensive was left on the shoulders of militias from Misrata, who are among the fiercest enemies of the general. While Haftar remains a divisive figure in Libya, many Western countries, despite their formal support for the GNA, are silently shifting towards him. Following the election of Donald Trump, many in Libya – perceiving the incoming U.S. president to be strongly anti-Islamist – see an opportunity for Haftar to further strengthen his political role ([Reuters](#), November 10). That dynamic could become part of a wider regional realignment based on deepening relations with Abdel Fatah al-Sisi's Egypt ([Il Foglio \[Rome\]](#), November 10).

For Egypt, the "problem of Libya" is not simply the direct security risk. Egypt has a much wider range of interests in Libya, going well beyond the current conflict and instability. Egypt has historically seen eastern Libya as its immediate backyard, and tribal and transnational links remain unyielding. Cyrenaica's culture and society remain very much oriented towards its eastern neighbor, and this has nurtured a sentiment of alienation from the rest of Libya that has in many cases fueled irredentist sentiment.

Moreover, Egypt has significant economic interests in Libya. Before the outbreak of the revolution, about two million Egyptians were working there, and their remittances were essential to sustain the livelihoods of many Egyptian families. The number of Egyptian expatriate workers in Libya is still significant, but has declined to 700,000. Greater stability in Libya would bring a number of immediate benefits to the Egyptian economy, mostly through bolstering opportunities for the Egyptian labor force in Libya, new opportunities for Egyptian investors and reciprocal Libyan investment in Egypt ([Al Ahram Online](#), July 29). This is of particular significance for Egypt as an economic downturn at home is a potential

threat to the political stability of Sisi's regime ([Al-Arabiya](#), October 4; [Middle East Eye](#), October 19; [Al Ahrām Online](#), October 15).

Conflicting Processes

While Morocco does not share a direct border with Libya and its immediate security is not threatened to the same extent as Algeria or Egypt, the country still has some significant interests in Libya and this has pushed the kingdom to play a more assertive diplomatic role.

Morocco also derives some strategic benefit from Algeria's concerns over Libya. An unstable Libya pushes Algeria to devote more resources to controlling its eastern border, reducing any Algerian threat to Morocco.

As Algeria started to play a more assertive diplomatic role in bringing different Libyan factions to the negotiating table, Morocco also pushed to have a role as a broker ([Jeune Afrique](#), March 9, 2015). The move is a part of the wider Moroccan process of avoiding regional geopolitical marginalization and countering Algerian influence. It meant, however, that negotiations developed along two different tracks, one in Algiers and one in Skhirat, a small seaside town between Rabat and Casablanca. The GNA agreement was struck in Skhirat – a success for Morocco – but the duplication of the negotiations reduced their effectiveness ([Maroc.ma](#), July 12, 2015).

Nonetheless, Rabat is one of the strategic pillars of the Western strategies in the region, and the United States and many European countries view its presence as a diplomatic broker positively. Algeria, on the other hand, sees Moroccan interference not only as a geopolitical issue, but a further problem preventing a resolution of the Libyan conflict.

Morocco sees the Libyan issue as a part of broader geopolitical competition with Algeria over the Sahara and the Sahel. While the problems emanating from these areas represent a common threat for both countries, the zero-sum vision that still informs Algerian-Moroccan relations prevents the two from cooperating more closely.

Non-Interference

Algeria is a key actor in the wider Mediterranean African political dynamics with genuine concerns about Libya. Its role in regard to its neighbor will continue to be significant. However, given its traditional doctrinal principle of non-interference – one of the most enduring legacies of its anti-colonial struggle – that role is unlikely to entail direct military action on Libyan soil.

Instead Algeria will stick to its traditional doctrinal principle of non-interference in international politics, while stepping up efforts to strengthen border security and acting as a facilitator to bring Libyan factions to the same table. For this reason, Algeria remains skeptical of General Haftar and his rise as a potential new strongman in Libya. It is concerned that, while Haftar may be able to alleviate problems in the short-term, he is likely to polarize the country further, creating the conditions for new waves of instability.

That puts Algeria at odds with Egypt, one of the regional powers most involved in Libya and possibly Haftar's most vocal supporter. It also leaves Algeria potentially isolated as Western powers soften their views toward Libya in general. Meanwhile, traditionally poor relations with Morocco hinder greater cooperation with Rabat, despite points of diplomatic alignment on Libya.

Dario Cristiani is assistant professor in International Affairs & Conflict Studies. He is the director of the Ex Training in Global Risk Analysis and Crisis Management at Vesalius College in Brussels and a political risk consultant. He received his PhD in Middle East & Mediterranean Studies from King's College, University of London, in 2015.