

**Can the Islamic State Unite  
Libya's Dawn and Dignity?**

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Libya's civil war has led to two opposing sides, each with its own parliament, prime minister, and army. On one side, *Operation Dignity* is led by *General Haftar* who was a former officer under Gaddafi before defecting in the 1980s and returning after the revolution in 2011. The operation aims at defeating the Islamists militias in Benghazi and excluding them from political power. He is allied with military units from the old regime, eastern tribes, eastern federalists, and militias from Zintan and other Western towns. On the other side, *Libya Dawn* is a largely Islamist coalition of formed as a counter-reaction to Operation Dignity. It is made up of former fighters with the *Libyan Islamic Fighting Group*, militias from Misrata, fighters from Tripoli, the ethnic Berber (Tuareg), and some communities from the western mountains and coast; in addition, it is allied with the Islamists militias in Benghazi fighting Haftar's forces. Even though both governments claim legitimacy and sovereignty over Libya, the international community recognizes the Tobruk government and the House of Representatives (Operation Dignity) rather than the Tripoli government and the General National Congress (Libya Dawn) as the legitimate power in the country.<sup>1</sup> Dignity is in control of parts of Cyrenaica in the east, specifically Beida and Tobruk, and parts of Benghazi while Dawn is in control of Tripoli and most of the west; however, this division between east and west is not absolute since Zintan which is located in the west is a major component of the Dignity coalition while some fighters in the east are loyal to the Dawn coalition.<sup>2</sup> These "formal" armies and institutions are backed by much more powerful "informal" militias. The conflict is drawn on Islamist versus secular factions, revolutionary versus military officers of the Gaddafi regime, or between rival towns in the West (Misrata and Zintan) over power in Tripoli. There is some truth to all of these labels; however, what cannot be doubted is that it's between rival militia coalitions aiming for power and legitimacy, and neither one them is strong enough to achieve a complete victory.<sup>3</sup>

General Haftar participated in the coup led by Gaddafi against the Libyan monarchy in 1969 and rose among the ranks to become of the top officers. Gaddafi even stated that "he (Haftar) was my

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<sup>1</sup> Wehrey, F. (2015) The Battle for Libya's Oil, The Atlantic, Retrieved from

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/the-battle-for-libyas-oil/385285/>

<sup>2</sup> Serwer, D. (2015) Libya's Escalating Civil War, Council on Foreign Relations, Retrieved from <http://www.cfr.org/libya/libyas-escalating-civil-war/p36649>

<sup>3</sup> Lacher, W. & Wehrey, F. (2015) Libya's Legitimacy Crisis, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-10-06/libyas-legitimacy-crisis>; Wehrey, F. (2014) What's Behind Libya's Spiraling Violence, Washington Post, Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/28/whats-behind-libyas-spiraling-violence/>

son, and I was like his spiritual father”. During a battle with Chad in 1987 over a strategic border area, Haftar was captured along with 400 of his men; however, Gaddafi disowned them. As a result, Haftar was enraged and joined the National Front for the Salvation of Libya which is a Chad-based opposition group backed by the CIA. He plotted an invasion of Libya to oust Gaddafi but was outflanked when Gaddafi backed a coup in Chad. This led to the CIA airlifting him and his men to Zaire and then the US where he remained for 20 years. He worked with the CIA as part of the Salvation Front in attempt to overthrow Gaddafi but failed, and when Gaddafi agreed to give up his nuclear weapons program after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Haftar’s ties to the CIA greatly weakened.<sup>4</sup> In 2011, he returned to Libya after the revolution but was unable to hold a prominent role due to the distrust the revolutionaries had of his previous ties to the Gaddafi regime; however, he was able to build significant support. In 2013, he launched Operation Dignity against Islamists after forging alliances, building an army, and receiving the support of old comrades from the military. The support for Operation Dignity stemmed from popular anger towards a paralyzed government and fears from the growing power of Islamists. On the other hand, his opponents state that his campaign is motivated by reaching power, label him as a new Gaddafi, and point out his ties to the CIA.<sup>5</sup>

Islamists have played a major role in the armed opposition that was able to overthrow the Gaddafi regime and continued to play a role in the civil war that ensued afterwards. Most of the factions sided with the Tripoli government while a small minority sided with the Tobruk government. After the toppling of Gaddafi and before the start of the civil war, elections were held in Libya and several Islamist groups such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group participated in the democratic process with aims of altering the institutions into implementing their understanding of Sharia law. The internal conflict was fought on several fronts: a media front, an institutional front, a judicial front, and a limited hard power front; however, after the attempted coup by General Khalifa Haftar in May 2014, the previously multi-dimensional conflict became a mainly armed one.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson, J. (2015) The Unravelling, The New Yorker, Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>

<sup>5</sup> Barfi, B. (2014) Khalifa Haftar Rebuilding Libya from the Top Down, Brookings Institution Research Notes, Number 22, p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Ashour, O. (2015) Between ISIS and a Failed State: The Saga of Libyan Islamists, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2015/08/~/\\_/media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx](http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2015/08/~/_/media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx)

The *Libyan Muslim Brotherhood* is different from those in neighboring countries since they barely had any presence before the 2011 revolution (almost no student activism, no social services, and no mosques to spread their messages...) which made their popularity (numbering only in a few thousands inside Libya and hundreds in exile) very limited in comparison to the Brotherhood in Tunisia or Egypt. Another difference is that the nature of the revolution was largely armed which made the Brotherhood participate in armed action alongside other factions in a form of a coalition thus making it much more resilient and safe from suffering the same fate as the Egyptian branch of the Brotherhood. Historically, the Brotherhood in Libya dates back to 1949 with their first clear organization structure being developed in 1968, but their activity was halted after the coup of Colonel Gaddafi. They were severely oppressed, never allowed to operate openly, and labeled as “stray dogs”. In the 1980s, an attempt to reestablish the organization in Libya was led by some Brotherhood members who studied in the United States but were cracked down on thus ending up executed or in prison. In the late 1990s and the 2000s, the Brotherhood entered into negotiations with the regime and made a comeback as part of the initiative led by Saif Al Islam Al Gaddafi who aimed to co-opt opposing political groups. After the revolution, leading figures from the Brotherhood supported and joined the National Transitional Council which politically led the revolution.<sup>7</sup>

In 2011, the Brotherhood restructured internally, elected a new leader, and decided to form a political party which focused on controlling its members as well as gaining domestic and international legitimacy. Due to the experience of many of the leaders of living in exile in the West, they were able to balance their ideological commitments to their members with the pragmatic needs of forming coalitions with non-Muslims, showing tolerance, and abiding by democratic principles.<sup>8</sup>

The Justice and Construction Party (JCP) currently leads the General National Congress along with other Islamist groups and was able to remain intact during the escalation of the civil war, but this strong internal organization has not been translated into a substantial increase in public support due to the demonization of the movement by the Gaddafi regime for years and the defeats suffered by the Brotherhood in the Middle East which has bolstered anti-Brotherhood

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<sup>7</sup> Ashour, O. (2015) Between ISIS and a Failed State: The Saga of Libyan Islamists, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/08/~media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx>

<sup>8</sup> Ashour, O. (2015) Between ISIS and a Failed State: The Saga of Libyan Islamists, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2015/08/~media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx>

activists. It's structurally independent of the Muslim Brotherhood and emphasizes that the Brotherhood cadres are only a fraction of its about 10,000 members; however, it failed in changing the public perception that it serves as the political arm of the Brotherhood. Furthermore, it has been criticized by other Islamists as well of compromising their principles to have political gains. All these factors have led to internal discussions regarding the future outlook of the movement with some calling for stepping back from the political field for a few years to focus on social and charitable work in an attempt to improve its reputation while others believe that such a move would have disastrous consequences on the organization.<sup>9</sup>

Misrata, home to one of the core groups fighting in the Libya Dawn coalition, is substantially different than the other cities in Libya since it operates with a certain degree of autonomy to suit its economic, political, and security interests. It is perceived as the seat of the Muslim Brotherhood in the country and played a key role in the toppling of the Gaddafi regime. The militias in Libya Dawn under the command of Misrata are Libya Shield Central, West, and Third Force located in the South.<sup>10</sup>

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was established in 1990 based on the model of the Egyptian Al Jihad organization. It's secretive, paramilitary, elitist, and aims to overthrow the regime; however, it was uncovered by the Libyan authorities and was forced to go public with its existence in 1995. Following a crackdown against the group, they led a low-level insurgency in Eastern Libya till 1998 before declaring a 3-year ceasefire. Before being able to review the ceasefire decision at the end of the 3-year period, 9/11 occurred and forced them into survival mode. As part of Saif Al Islam's initiative as well, the LIFG entered into negotiations with the regime in 2005 and published a book in 2010 which revised their ideas regarding fighting against rulers and judging individuals as apostates. After the 2011 revolution, the organization as a whole did not participate in armed activities, but many of its members joined the opposition militias and played a major role in the defeat of the Gaddafi regime especially since many of them previously fought in Afghanistan, Algeria, and Chechnya. It later transformed into the

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<sup>9</sup> Fitzgerald, M. (2014) Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Struggles to Grow, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/01/libyas-muslim-brotherhood-struggles-to-grow/>

<sup>10</sup> Kadlec, A. & Morajea, H. (2015) The Dawn Divides: The Islamic State and Libya's Inter-Islamist War, War of the Rocks, Retrieved from <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/the-dawn-divides-the-islamic-state-and-libyas-inter-islamist-war/>

*Libyan Islamic Movement for Change* (LIMC), and many of its figures are members of the *Tripoli Military Council* (TMC).<sup>11</sup>

*Ansar Al Sharia in Libya* (ASL), responsible for the 2012 Benghazi attack on the American consulate, strongly emphasizes monotheism, believes in the literal authority of God stemmed in the Quran (democracy and secularism are seen as infidelities), only considers Muslims to be genuine if they wage jihad, and considers the US as the enemy for aiming to impose its own values on the Muslim world. It initially gained attention and popular support through a large outreach program (*dawa*) which included social services, religious education, and security. This falls under the calls of Zawahiri and Maqdisi to focus on outreach rather than only military jihad. This gained the trust of the local population due to the competence shown unlike the corruption of the Libyan government. With these services, ASL spread into large areas such as Benghazi, Tripoli, Sirte, Derna, and other locales. This spread was not only limited inside Libya since operatives were sent to Syria, Sudan, and Gaza to participate in very impressive humanitarian relief efforts. The ultimate aim is to build an Islamic society supportive of the implementation of Sharia law. Even though the main focus was outreach, there was also participation in jihad as well as *hisbah* where transgressions of Sharia law are punished by vigilantes. This also included hosting training camps for foreign fighters before sending them to wage jihad elsewhere such as in Syria and Tunisia.<sup>12</sup>

After the offensive declared by General Haftar against Islamist groups in Eastern Libya in May 2014, ASL had to shift its focus from outreach towards military action confined to Benghazi. This showed the failure of the outreach approach in Libya when encountered with a vicious reaction, as it failed as well in Egypt and Tunisia. ASL entered into a military coalition of Islamist groups in Benghazi called *Majlis Shura Thuwar Benghazi* (MSTB), Benghazi Revolutionaries Consultative Council, whose leader was ASL's leader Mohammad Zahawi. It also entered into a similar coalition in Derna (*Majlis Shura Mujahidin Derna* (MSMD)), but it does not have a leading position in the alliance as it does in Benghazi due to its weaker position in Derna. MSTB is mainly engaged against Haftar's forces while MSMD is engaged against

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<sup>11</sup> Ashour, O. (2015) Between ISIS and a Failed State: The Saga of Libyan Islamists, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from [http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2015/08/~/\\_/media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx](http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2015/08/~/_/media/B4AB4D89F3374FD7B3D98E9F92A7C664.ashx)

<sup>12</sup> Zelin, A. (2015) The Rise and Decline of Ansar al Sharia in Libya, Hudson Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya>

Haftar and the Islamic State as well.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, ASL maintains a strong presence in the western port city of Zuwarah which is a major hub for migrant smuggling and controls the nearby Mellitah refinery which has an oil pipeline to Italy. It is believed that the Tripoli government allows ASL to receive the profits of the oil exports. The oil exports and the migrant smuggling bring in significant profits for the group.<sup>14</sup>

The rise of the Islamic State as well as the death of its leader Zahawi in 2015 greatly affected the group and its recruitment efforts. As a reaction and in an attempt to compete with the Islamic State, ASL started a media campaign to highlight its services and battles against Haftar as well as applying Sharia more openly through an Islamic police force and a Sharia court in Benghazi.<sup>15</sup> Abu Khalid al Madani was appointed as the new leader of the group and reportedly resisted calls to unify with the Islamic State in Libya. In spite of several known figures from ASL declaring allegiance to the Islamic State, the group as a whole has not pledged allegiance to Baghdadi perhaps due to the strong links they have with *Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb* (AQIM) and Al Qaeda veteran Mokhtar Belmokhtar.<sup>16</sup>

AQIM previously had close ties to the LIFG, and since the fall of Gaddafi, it took advantage of the chaos and power vacuum to establish a base in Libya. Because of the involvement of the Al Qaeda group, the Algerian Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC), in the trans-Saharan smuggling trade, AQIM developed close ties to the Tuareg tribes who served as guides for the smugglers. The frustration and marginalization of these tribes allowed AQIM to develop some form of ties and support with the Tuareg community. Some AQIM members even married into the Tuareg tribal structure to strengthen this relationship through familial ties. This helped AQIM better connect with ASL in Derna and Benghazi in terms of resources and manpower. *Al Murabitoun*, an AQIM splinter group, has also established a presence in the Acacus Mountains on the southwestern border with Algeria as well as a strong presence in the border town of Ghat, which is traditionally Tuareg. These ties which AQIM has built with the Tuareg has allowed Al Qaeda to form powerful smuggling networks across the Sahel and Sahara

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<sup>13</sup> Zelin, A. (2015) The Rise and Decline of Ansar al Sharia in Libya, Hudson Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya>

<sup>14</sup> The Soufan Group (2016) Libya, Extremism, and the Consequences of Collapse, The Soufan Group, January 2016, pp. 14-15

<sup>15</sup> Zelin, A. (2015) The Rise and Decline of Ansar al Sharia in Libya, Hudson Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya>

<sup>16</sup> Joscelyn, T. (2015) Ansar al Sharia Libya Fights on Under New Leader, The Long War Journal, Retrieved from <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php>

coupled with their increasing presence in Libya thus providing new weapons, ports, and markets for goods smuggled from West Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Libya is also home to one of the Islamic State's affiliates where it has a heavy presence along the central coast, administers Sharia law, and organizes training camps. The *Islamic State in Libya* (ISL) was able to exploit the chaos of the civil war to divide opponents and initiate operations in the country through the Al Battar Brigade which fought alongside the Islamic State in Eastern Syria. The militants were trained in Syria, sent back home to Libya, and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi in October 2014 after operating under the cover of *Majlis Shura Shabab al Islam* (MSSI) for several months in Derna. The Islamic State also sent senior leaders to aid the formation and strengthening of the group such as the Iraqi Abu Nabil Al Anbari who was killed by a US airstrike in November 2015. They adopted and implemented the same brutal tactics and methods of social control as the core group; in addition, they showed rapid capabilities in recruitment.<sup>18</sup> The estimated number of fighters with ISL ranges from 3,000 to 5,000<sup>19</sup>, 70% of whom are foreigners from Tunisia, Egypt, KSA, Sudan, and Algeria.

The main rival of ISL is ASL which is part of the larger rivalry between the Islamic State and Al Qaeda, and ISL has encouraged the fracturing of ASL and has been able to attract leading figures from ASL such as its religious scholar Abu Abdallah al Libi.<sup>20</sup> They were able to completely control the coastal town of Derna before being expelled from it by a tacit alliance that united local militias (mainly MSMD) and Haftar's forces in June 2015 against ISL; however, they were able to establish another stronghold in the major city of Sirte along with coastal towns to the east and are constantly launching guerilla attacks in Tripoli and Benghazi.<sup>21</sup> It has also become a hub for foreign fighters who come to aid the Libyan affiliate of the Islamic State or to receive training for launching attacks in their home countries.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Soufan Group (2016) Libya, Extremism, and the Consequences of Collapse, The Soufan Group, January 2016, pp. 14-15

<sup>18</sup> McCants, W. (2015) ISIS's Apocalyptic Warning in Libya, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/02/17-isis-libya-apocalyptic-executions-christians-egypt>

<sup>19</sup> AlRababah, A. & Wehrey, F. (2015) Splitting the Islamists: The Islamic State's Creeping Advance in Libya, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60447>

<sup>20</sup> AlRababah, A. & Wehrey, F. (2015) Splitting the Islamists: The Islamic State's Creeping Advance in Libya, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60447>

<sup>21</sup> Gambhir, H. (2015) Meet ISIL's Most Dangerous Affiliates, Politico Magazine, Retrieved from <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/12/isis-paris-san-bernardino-affiliates-213438?o=0>

<sup>22</sup> Gambhir, H. (2015) Meet ISIL's Most Dangerous Affiliates, Politico Magazine, Retrieved from <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/12/isis-paris-san-bernardino-affiliates-213438?o=0>



Sirte is different from Derna since ISL was able to lay a strong groundwork for its arrival into the city through defections from ASL, arranging deals with local tribes and ex-Gaddafi loyalists in a similar manner as done with ex-Baathists in Iraq; in addition, there are no other competing insurgent groups as in Derna.<sup>23</sup> Sirte also allows ISL to push both east and west, and this was seen with the spread of ISL fighters into Harawa, Bin Jawad, Nawfaliya, and other areas in the “Oil Crescent” which is full of oil pipelines and fields stretching east from Sirte in central Libya to Benghazi in the northeast. This gives it the ability to cause economic disruptions through attacks in these facilities as well as recruiting from local tribes marginalized by Misratan militias that came to the area during the fight to oust Gaddafi. Furthermore, ISL is attacking the different factions in Libya Dawn, mainly Misratan and Islamist factions, with the hopes of causing a split within the coalition and attracting the more radical elements in the coalition to join its ranks.<sup>24</sup>

According to a report circulated by UN experts, it is more difficult for Islamic State to expand in Libya as it did in Syria and Iraq due to the sectarian homogeneity in the Libyan population and is not embedded within the local communities as it is viewed as an “outsider”. Despite the fact that ISL can launch attacks in most of the Libyan territory, its ability to expand its territory rapidly is vastly limited.<sup>25</sup>

Another sign of the increasing emphasis on the Libyan affiliate of the Islamic State is the publishing of the execution video of 14 Egyptian Christians on the coast of Libya in February 2015 which makes different attributions to the apocalypse and Day of Judgment.<sup>26</sup> Libya is important to the Islamic State due to the projection it provides into Africa which opens the chance of co-opting regional jihadist movements, its proximity to Europe helps it serve as a potential staging ground for attacks targeting the West, and it offers a fallback option to the leaders of the core IS group in Iraq and Syria.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Zelin, A. (2015) The Islamic State’s Burgeoning Capital in Sirte Libya, Washington Institute, Retrieved from <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-islamic-states-burgeoning-capital-in-sirte-libya>

<sup>24</sup> AlRababah, A. & Wehrey, F. (2015) Taking on Operation Dawn: The Creeping Advance of the Islamic State in Western Libya, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60490>

<sup>25</sup> Nichols, M. (2015) Islamic State in Libya Hampered by Lack of Fighters, Reuters, Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-islamic-state-un-idUSKBN0TK5RW20151201>

<sup>26</sup> McCants, W. (2015) ISIS’s Apocalyptic Warning in Libya, Brookings Institution, Retrieved from <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/02/17-isis-libya-apocalyptic-executions-christians-egypt>

<sup>27</sup> Barr, N. & Gartenstein-Ross, D. (2015) Is Libya the Next Stronghold of the Islamic State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/02/is-libya-the-next-stronghold-of-the-islamic-state/>

Oil is a crucial factor in the war in Libya and is related to the expansion of the Islamic State into the country. The two major oil-pipeline terminals are located in Al Sidr and Ras Lanuf which are both under the control of federalist militias allied with Haftar. Attempts were made by Libya Dawn forces, mainly Misratan militias, to gain control of the terminals but were unsuccessful.<sup>28</sup> ISL has tried to control the oil facilities but failed to control more than 10%<sup>29</sup> especially since both rival governments are attempting to do so as well. It is also more difficult to earn revenues from the oil due to the location of oil installations far from the population centers as well as the control of other militias over the big refineries. In order for ISL to have a chance of controlling the oil, they have to control the entire sector from the wells to the export terminals. Even if this is done, it is very difficult to export the oil into the market due to international monitoring.<sup>30</sup> In spite of the stated difficulties, ISL launched several large assaults during January 2016 on the Es Sider and Ras Lanuf oil terminals in the north of the country, close to its stronghold in Sirte. The assaults failed, but they did cause huge damage. They also signaled ISL's intent to try and control the oil terminals and ports, as stated by an ISL fighter in a video published by on the group's official Telegram channel.<sup>31</sup>

It is believed that Operation Dignity is backed by Egypt and the UAE while Libya Dawn is backed by Qatar, Sudan, and Turkey.<sup>32</sup> Egypt's policy towards Libya is part of the larger campaign led by President Sisi against Islamists in the region and falls part of his attempt to prevent the instability in Libya from further complicating the situation in Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula specifically. Comparisons have even been drawn between Haftar and Sisi. Furthermore, the UAE's position is in conformity with the anti-Islamist stance it has taken in the past years. Both countries cooperated in the bombing campaign targeting Libya Dawn militias while also supplying Haftar's forces with weapons and supplies.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, Qatar and

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<sup>28</sup> Wehrey, F. (2015) The Battle for Libya's Oil, The Atlantic, Retrieved from

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/the-battle-for-libyas-oil/385285/>

<sup>29</sup> Micallef, J. (2015) The Islamic State in Libya: Why It Matters, Huffington Post, Retrieved from

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-islamic-state-in-liby\\_b\\_8842944.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-islamic-state-in-liby_b_8842944.html)

<sup>30</sup> Brannen, K. & Johnson, K. (2015) The Islamic State of Libya Isn't Much of a State, Foreign Policy, Retrieved from

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/17/the-islamic-state-of-libya-isnt-much-of-a-state/>

<sup>31</sup> Al Warfalli, A. & Elumami, A. (2016) Islamic State Attack Sets Storage Tanks Ablaze at Libyan Oil Terminal, Reuters, Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-idUSKCN0UZ0PQ>; MEE Staff (2016) Islamic State Attacks Key Libya Oil Terminal for Second Time in a Week, Middle East Eye, Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/islamic-state-attacks-key-libya-oil-terminal-second-time-week-1657344876>

<sup>32</sup> Lacher, W. & Wehrey, F. (2015) Libya's Legitimacy Crisis, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2014-10-06/libyas-legitimacy-crisis>

<sup>33</sup> Kinninmont, J. (2015) How Wgypt Sees the IS Threat in Libya, BBC News, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-31493399>

Turkey are natural supporters of the Dawn militias due to their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist driven ideology. The role of KSA, another influential Gulf state, in the Libyan civil war has been minimal which makes them capable of pursuing a conciliatory role in the country through pushing for ceasefires and a unity government. Its influence through the Arab states that are more involved in Libya such as Qatar, UAE, and Egypt could be used to push for dialogue and an end to the conflict. Such a role would bolster its influence in the Arab world in the wake of the nuclear agreement of the West with Iran and the difficulties it is facing in Syria and Yemen; however, this all depends on the willingness of KSA to play such a role in a relatively distant country that has no direct effect on it and the willingness of Egypt to accept Saudi leadership in a crisis that is directly on its border and that affects its national security.<sup>34</sup>

Other non-Arab countries have entered into the equation after ISL strengthened its hold over Sirte such as the US, France, and the UK. This is also influenced by the ongoing migrant crisis which continues to pose a huge challenge to the EU. A significant portion of the migrants reaching Europe have done so through crossing the Mediterranean from Libya on makeshift boats by traffickers. It became clear for the EU that targeting smugglers, monitoring refugee flows from the sea, and increasing border security will not solve the crisis since they do not address the root causes which have led thousands of people to embark on a life-threatening journey to reach Europe.<sup>35</sup> It has been reported that French President Hollande discussed a possible intervention in Libya with Russian President Putin during their meeting in Moscow on November 26, 2015.<sup>36</sup> Another sign of increased international attention is the reconnaissance missions, as well as some bombing missions, of France and the US over Sirte.<sup>37</sup> In addition, France moved 3,500 soldiers in Mali to a new base around 45 miles from the southern border with Libya, and Britain announced it is willing to send 13,000 Special Forces to Libya to assist in counter-terrorism operations. The Italian government has also been reported to be preparing a 5,000 strong intervention force to deploy in Libya made up of military and Special Forces units

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<sup>34</sup> Libya Politics and Security (2015) A Larger Role for Saudi Arabia in Libya, Menas Associates, Retrieved from <https://www.menas.co.uk/a-larger-role-for-saudi-arabia-in-libya/>

<sup>35</sup> Brantner, F. (2015) The Libyan Context of the Migration Crisis, European Council on Foreign Relations, Retrieved from [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_the\\_libyan\\_context\\_of\\_the\\_migration\\_crisis3040](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_libyan_context_of_the_migration_crisis3040)

<sup>36</sup> Micallef, J. (2015) Al Baghdadi Zeroes in on Libya: The New Evolution of Islamic State, Huffington Post, Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/al-baghdadi-zeroes-in-on\\_b\\_8792394.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/al-baghdadi-zeroes-in-on_b_8792394.html)

<sup>37</sup> Stephen, C. (2015) Warplanes in Libyan Skies may Signal next Major Battle in Fight to Contain Islamic State, The Guardian, Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/06/warplanes-libya-next-battlefront-isis-nato>

from Italy, France, Germany, and Great Britain.<sup>38</sup> Whether this translates into something tangible remains to be seen, but it is clear that there is something in the works to try and counter this Islamic State expansion into Libya; however, such an intervention raises several questions regarding the Libyan ground forces who will be supported by the West against ISL and whether the focus of the campaign would be only against ISL or to support the new unity government. The West supporting one faction against ISL could be seen as an intervention in the favor of an internal side over the other and lead to counter-alliances with other foreign powers. For example, the West supporting the powerful Misratan militias which are the closest to the ISL controlled Sirte could antagonize Sirte's population who has already suffered abuses at the hands of the Misratan militias when they took over the city in 2011. Another scenario of the West supporting the Petroleum Facilities Guard to the east of Sirte could lead to these militias using the support they got to overpower the Misratan militias in their conflict over the region's oil. This would undoubtedly have a very negative effect on the ability to reach a political solution to the conflict. Furthermore, Western troops on the ground in Libya could hamper the ongoing attempt of reaching a political solution to the conflict since the new unity government could be labeled as a traitor surrendering the sovereignty of Libya by the already powerful ISL and ASL. In order for the Western intervention to have a positive impact rather than just being a reactionary move to the growing ISL threat, there must be a national coordinating mechanism between all militias on the ground and an effort for their gradual integration into army units. This greatly depends on the success of the Presidency Council and the new unity government; otherwise, it would be very difficult to implement the above mentioned strategy. The intervening powers must also make sure that the already involved foreign powers such as UAE and Qatar support this plan and do not try to disrupt it.<sup>39</sup>

The rise of the Islamic State has tilted the balance in favor of the moderates. Salah Jabu, a Libya Dawn commander stated that the next enemies to be fought are ASL and ISL. In spite of Misrata militias providing weapons and funding to MSTB in which Ansar Al Sharia is a member, they state that they only support revolutionary militias and not an AL Qaeda linked group. Furthermore, they added that the threat of ISL should be dealt with through a united Libyan

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<sup>38</sup> Micallef, J. (2015) The Islamic State in Libya: Why It Matters, Huffington Post, Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-islamic-state-in-liby\\_b\\_8842944.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-v-micallef/the-islamic-state-in-liby_b_8842944.html)

<sup>39</sup> Wehrey, F. & Lacher, W. (2016) The Right Way to Intervene in Libya, Foreign Affairs, Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2016-02-07/next-front-against-isis>

government and rule of law.<sup>40</sup> This rise, as well as the waves of refugees reaching Europe, could have been the trigger for intensifying the peace negotiation efforts by the international community. A *UN-brokered deal* was signed on December 17 in Morocco by the rival Libyan factions which aims at forming a unity government to end the years of violence; however, key figures from both sides reject the agreement thus placing the possibility of its implementation in question.<sup>41</sup> Several major challenges lie ahead for the success of this deal such as the acceptance of both parliaments for the deal, the rejection of key Islamist groups in Tripoli for the deal and could attack the new unity government if it is formed, General Haftar continues to lead the military operations in East Libya in spite of the agreement transferring the power of senior military posts to the Presidential Council as soon as the agreement was signed, Western powers waiting for approval from the new government to launch attacks against ISL which is a dangerous move without coordinating with the different armed groups especially the Islamist ones, and the need to build consensus between the different Libyan factions so that real unity and long term peace can be reached.<sup>42</sup>

The political agreement transforms the General National Congress to the consultative State Council and assigns the House of Representatives as the only legislative authority which has the power to grant confidence to the new unity government. Furthermore, the functions of the head of state are performed by the Presidency Council which includes nine people representing all the factions on the ground. The agreement earned the support of the House of Representatives on January 28; however, this excluded clause 8 of the agreement which stipulates that the powers of the military will be transferred to the Presidency Council. This clause aims at reappointing the military leadership in the country where the current head of the armed forces is General Haftar. This exclusion greatly undermines the attempts for peace and puts the agreement at risk due to the rejection of all other factions of Haftar staying in his position. The presence of the House of Representatives in Tobruk under the control of Haftar limits its ability to take decisions that do not coincide with his interests. Until now, the House of Representatives has not accepted the proposed unity government from the Presidency Council, and even if it does, the absence of

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<sup>40</sup> Wehrey, F. (2015) The Battle for Libya's Oil, The Atlantic, Retrieved from

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/02/the-battle-for-libyas-oil/385285/>

<sup>41</sup> Al Jazeera (2015) Rival Libyan Factions Sign UN Backed Peace Deal, Al Jazeera, Retrieved from

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/libya-rival-parliaments-sign-backed-deal-151217131709056.html>

<sup>42</sup> Eljarh, M. (2015) The Five Key Challenges to a Sustainable Peace in Libya, Atlantic Council, Retrieved from

<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-five-key-challenges-to-a-sustainable-peace-in-libya>

clause 8 would lead to Dawn factions rejecting the whole agreement and preventing the government from moving to Tripoli. This would lead to the formation of a third government in Libya, where neither of the three is capable of controlling and governing the whole country.<sup>43</sup>

The two main conflicting sides (Dawn and Dignity) cannot be clearly distinguished based on ideological lines due to the diverse views which exist within each loosely built coalition. It cannot be portrayed purely as Islamists versus secular since within the Islamists are different ranges of commitment. For example, some are more open to the democratic process and plurality while others are more extreme in this regard. This is also coupled with revolutionaries who believe that Operation Dignity is led by a figure largely similar to Gaddafi and fear it would undo the gains of the revolution. Those supporting Haftar's campaign may only be doing so out of fear of the spread of Islamism rather than wanting to go back to the way things were before the 2011 revolution. It is also doubtful that Haftar would bring a democratic system since his whole campaign is based on cancelling out a significant segment of the Libyan population which has Islamist views, whether they were moderate or extreme. This lack of differentiation does not really spell out pluralism and democracy. The rise of a third force, the Islamic State, may have led to certain recalculations by both sides, and more importantly, by the international community. The threats posed by the Islamic State to Europe as well as the huge flow of refugees into the continent has led the Western powers to act more decisively regarding the ongoing conflict in Libya. This was seen with the international meetings being held and willingness of major powers such as France and the UK to mobilize troops for this purpose. This was also reflected diplomatically with the push for the signing of the agreement brokered by the UN, but the ability to implement this decision and the degree of acceptance of the militias fighting on the ground remains to be seen especially since signs of a possible failure have already appeared. If the Western intervention does occur, it must be very carefully prepared and implemented because it could worsen the current divide and empower the presence of ISL and ASL which thrive on anti-Western propaganda. Until now, the Islamic State has had a harder time in expanding in Libya due to the homogeneity in the Libyan population where it cannot exploit a Sunni-Shiite divide as it did in Syria and Iraq. In addition, the opposing militias are relatively strong and cannot be overrun easily. The sanctuary the Islamic State has been able to

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<sup>43</sup> Toaldo, M. (2016) Libya's Political Stalemate, Carnegie Endowment, Retrieved from <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=62656>

build in Sirte gives it a fallback option and a safe place for its leaders away from the air campaign targeting them in Syria and Iraq by Russia and the coalition led by the US; however, major powers seem to be aware of the developing situation which is why talks have intensified regarding a campaign in Libya. Until now, the Islamic State has been able to operate with a certain degree of freedom, and the longer it takes for Dawn and Dignity to reach an end to the conflict and the longer it takes the international community to take a clear decision regarding a campaign targeting the Islamic State in Libya, the more difficult it will be to counter the accelerating spread of Baghdadi's Caliphate in the North African country.