

Here's What 'Regime Change' Wrought

by Douglas DeGroot

Feb. 26—Libyan al-Qaeda operatives, who were trained in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, and were brought back to Libya by President Obama and the British last year to organize the on-the-ground portion of the regime change in Libya, have plunged the country into unprecedented violence. These seasoned al-Qaeda fighters have set off a process of chaos that is being compared by some to post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. Some observers do not rule out that certain former Qaddafi strongholds may become areas of insurgency comparable to the Sunni Triangle in Iraq.

Most importantly, as we shall show, this murderous chaos was the *intent* of the British hand behind the regime-change operation—in addition to representing a step toward confrontation, potentially thermonuclear war, with Russia and China.

The score-settling and fighting for advantage in the post-Qaddafi era, by geographically based militias all over the country, are leading to a breakdown of society. These fighters number some 75,000 men in arms, by the count of the nominal government, the Transitional National Council (TNC).

Because the TNC does not control them, the militias are the law and authority in their own areas, in many cases, providing services to the population. And these local authorities want to prevent the extension of the TNC's mandate into their fiefdoms.

The militias are well armed, having looted Qaddafi's armories in different areas of the country, as the long-term leader lost control. Many of these weapons are being smuggled into Algeria, to countries in the Sahel zone and West Africa. This weapons flow is raising great concern in the Sahel and sub-Saharan African countries. Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Algeria are among the countries threatened.

The Tuareg Desert nomads had traditionally been allied with Qaddafi. Since his murder, they have been persuaded to form a grouping in the northern Mali

desert, and to militate for an independent homeland there, a direct threat to the sovereignty of Mali.

Pervasive Violence

Shortly after the destabilization began, reports of atrocities surfaced. The initial reports were of Qaddafi loyalists who were executed, and the murder of many black Africans or dark-skinned Libyans who were mistakenly thought to be African. A Turkish crew chief working there for a Turkish company on a project with a black African crew, reported that his entire crew had been murdered.

This activity was reported very early during the 2011 destabilization that led to the regime change and the ordered murder of Qaddafi and his son. Human Rights Watch reported murders of Africans and of regime loyalists who were found with their hands tied.

An Amnesty International report released this month detailed widespread torture in prisons and makeshift detention facilities, under the auspices of the regime established by Obama and NATO. In some cases, prisoners were tortured to death. Amnesty investigators documented beatings with chains, metal, and cable; electric shocks; and fingernail extraction. According to the [report](#), the TNC has conducted no investigations of the torture of prisoners and other revenge attacks. The militias can do as they please.

Amnesty's report, titled "Militias Threaten Hopes for Libya," is being used to entice foreign support to the TNC for a list of ineffective proposals to help the Council get the militias under control.

Precalculated Conflict

Oligarchical planners of the regime change were familiar with the antipathy to central government in Libya, which has been well known since the time that the Ottoman Empire occupied coastal Libya (1551-1911). The Ottomans never had the inland regions under their control, a situation that led to ongoing chaos in western Libya. The same was true during Italian rule (1911-43).

Policy proposals are now being floated to the effect that the largely self-appointed TNC, which cannot control the militias, should be helped to get control in the country. Any U.S. program aimed at helping the TNC with anti-militia propaganda, and engaging with the more moderate Islamists, not only would *not* make the TNC immune to jihadism, but would backfire, giving the jihadists a pretext to mobilize against this process, turning Libya into a remake of Somalia or Afghanistan.



The burning of Colonel Qaddafi's tent in Tripoli, Aug. 24, 2011. Since Qaddafi's murder, the violence has increased.

Up to now, the militias, although not heeding the directives of the TNC, are not trying to overthrow it either. The Council is handling the marketing of oil, which is back up to 1.4 million barrels per day, around the level it was for much of Qaddafi's tenure. (Qaddafi had never gotten above that until the last few years, when it reached 1.7 million bpd. The international oil mafia kept Libya's oil production artificially suppressed during the Qaddafi period.)

During the rule of the feudal King Idris (1951-69), production was as high as 3 million bpd. Qaddafi's group conducted the coup against the British-backed King on Sept. 1, 1969, one day before the King's son was to succeed his father on the throne. The British, who had taken control of Libya from Italy in 1943, put Idris on the throne in 1951, when they granted Libya independence, making Libya a federal monarchy over the East, West, and South.

During the 2011 destabilization of Qaddafi, the Libyan rebels ditched the flag adopted by Qaddafi, and took up Idris's flag, which had been inspired by the flag designed by Mark Sykes for the first Arab revolt, supposedly against the British, led by British agent T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"). This is now the official flag of Libya.

The militias are competing for the best position to extort benefits from the TNC, which will be managing the oil wealth, as well as fighting in towns and cities to seize prime commercial real estate. They hope to parlay

their military muscle into power and influence in post-Qaddafi Libya.

On Jan. 4, 2012, the day after a battle between militias on one of Libya's busiest streets killed four fighters, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, chairman of the TNC, warned that Libya risks sliding into civil war unless the militias can be controlled. A similar incident took place in Tripoli on Feb. 1, between militias from Misrata and Zintan. In western Libya, where Qaddafi had stronger support, the brunt of the fighting was borne by regional, not Islamic, militias. Armed clashes are reported frequently in Tripoli, sometimes because of ethnic antipathies.

The Role of al-Qaeda

According to WikiLeaks, on Feb. 15, 2008, long before the operation against Qaddafi started, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli reported, in a secret cable to Washington entitled "Extremism in Eastern Libya," that the area was a hotbed of anti-American, pro-jihadist sentiment. The report was corroborated by captured al-Qaeda personnel documents that came into American hands in 2007, and were analyzed by the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

On July 15, 2011, the Obama Administration recognized the Libyan rebels as the legitimate representatives of the Libyan people. Media reports continued to surface of high-technology missiles getting into the hands of al-Qaeda affiliates, after the Libyan rebels took control of areas of Libya with the help of NATO air strikes. Former U.S. intelligence figures pointed out that the British/Saudi-run al-Qaeda network supported the uprising and would try to take advantage of the vacuum after Qaddafi's elimination, especially among the base of the rebels, the Islamist pro-jihad population of eastern Libya, which had the highest per-capita percentage of foreign fighters who went to Iraq to fight against the NATO forces there.

Several Libyan exiles rose to senior levels in al-Qaeda. One was Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, who was killed in Pakistan.

Abdul-Hakim al-Hasadi, a Libyan and former

Guantanamo detainee, had fought American troops in Afghanistan and recruited Libyans to fight Americans in Iraq. Reports surfaced shortly after the Libyan regime-change operation started, that he had formed an “Islamic Emirate” in an eastern Libyan town.

Abdel Hakim Belhaj, a Libyan, was captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and turned over to Qaddafi, who imprisoned him and later released him. Belhaj heads the Tripoli Military Council, and is opposed by the some of the powerful local militias in the western part of the country. He was a former leader in the London-based Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a terrorist outfit. He is considered to be one of the most significant figures in the fight to oust Qaddafi.

The Tripoli Military Council, headed by Belhaj, and the February 17 Brigade in eastern Libya are two of the more prominent Islamist units operating in Libya are .

A fellow LIFG member, Abd al-Rahman al-Faqih, was on a UN list of al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in 2006. He was later convicted *in absentia* by a Moroccan court for complicity in the May 2003 suicide bombings in Casablanca. An LIFG plan to overthrow Qaddafi closely paralleled what actually happened, including a

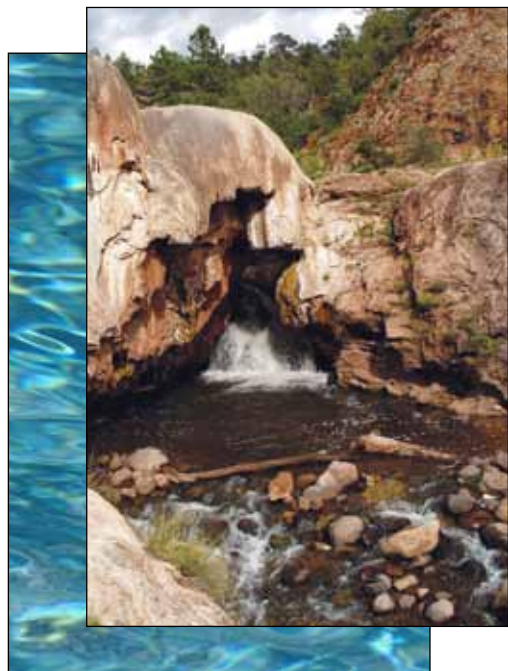
suicide bomber blowing open the gates to a military barracks.

Belhaj is accused by some of being an agent of the Persian Gulf statelets, as they try to steer post-Qaddafi Libya. Qaddafi never made any secret of his contempt for the monarchs and potentates of these Gulf entities.

Belhaj went to Istanbul in late November, for discussions of the situation in Syria. There are reports of a very large number of Libyans in Syria helping to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad, although some who are described as Libyans may be Arabic-speaking special forces from other countries.

Qatar sent special forces to arm and train the best rebel militias, and Qatari intelligence assets called in NATO missiles during the war. Now Qatar is not backing the TNC, but is funding Islamic militias who are resisting TNC efforts to co-opt their fighters into the national Army. The Islamist militias are stronger in the East, where the fighting to dislodge Qaddafi’s forces was easier because he had much less support, in what had been the base of King Idris. Because of their aid to the anti-Qaddafi rebels, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have carved out zones of influence in Libya.

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