

The Al Qaeda Connection: Who are we Helping in Libya? Here are Some Answers.

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, March 27, 2011

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research Editor's Note

The following press excerpts by the Fabius Mazimus website provide information on the nature of the Libyan opposition, including its links to Al Qaeda.

Summary: This post looks at some of what little public information we have about the Libyan rebels. It's not encouraging, and forms a weird foundation for our interventionists dreams about Libya.

Contents

1. Who are the rebels? – Libya's Opposition Leadership Comes into Focus, Stratfor, 20 March 2011
2. Confident guessing: "A Libyan Fight for Democracy, or a Civil War?", New York Times, 21 March 2011
3. A cautionary note: "Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links", *The Telegraph*, 25 March 2011
4. About the rebels organization and military skills: Libya: rebels without a hope?, Martin Ottmann, website of the School of International Relation at the U of Nottingham, 21 March 2011
5. About the rebels military resources: "Libyan rebels' weapons deficit", International Institute of Strategic Studies, 8 March 2011
6. For more information

Excerpts

(1) [Libya's Opposition Leadership Comes into Focus](#), Stratfor, 20 March 2011 — It's coming into focus, but still remains vague. We're fighting to bring a new regime into power, of a nature To Be Determined Later. Excerpt:

One of the biggest problems Western governments have faced throughout the Libyan crisis has been identifying who exactly the "eastern rebels" are. Until the uprising began in February, there was thought to be no legitimate opposition to speak of in the country, and thus no contacts between the United States, the United Kingdom, France or others. Many of those who now speak for the rebel movement are headquartered in Benghazi. There have been several defections, however, from the regime of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi to the eastern rebel leadership, and it is men like these with whom the West is now trying to engage as the possible next generation of

leadership in Libya, should its unstated goal of regime change come to fruition.

The structure through which the Libyan opposition is represented is the National Transitional Council. The first man to announce its creation was former Libyan Justice Minister Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, who defected from the government Feb. 21 and declared the establishment of a “transitional government” Feb. 26. At the time, Abdel-Jalil claimed that it would give way to national elections within three months, though this was clearly never a realistic goal.

...The National Transitional Council officially came into being March 6. ... The transitional council asserts that it derives its legitimacy from the series of city councils that have been running the affairs of the east since the February uprising that turned all of eastern Libya into rebel-held territory.

... It is important to note that little of the territory that fell into rebel control in the early days of the insurrection was actually occupied through conquest. Many military and security forces in the east either deserted or defected to the opposition, which brought not only men and arms, but also the territory those troops ostensibly controlled. Most fighting that occurred once the situation transitioned into what is effectively a civil war, particularly in the main population centers along the coastal stretch between Benghazi and Sirte, consisted of relatively small, lightly armed formations conducting raids, rather than either side decisively defeating a major formation and pacifying a town.

- (2) [“A Libyan Fight for Democracy, or a Civil War?”](#), *New York Times*, 21 March 2011 — Confident guessing with one cautionary note. Excerpt:

The question has hovered over the Libyan uprising from the moment the first tank commander defected to join his cousins protesting in the streets of Benghazi: Is the battle for Libya the clash of a brutal dictator against a democratic opposition, or is it fundamentally a tribal civil war?

... “It is a very important question that is terribly near impossible to answer,” said Paul Sullivan, a political scientist at Georgetown University who has studied Libya. “It could be a very big surprise when Qaddafi leaves and we find out who we are really dealing with.”

- (3) [“Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links”](#), *The Telegraph*, 25 March 2011 — “Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, the Libyan rebel leader, has said jihadists who fought against allied troops in Iraq are on the front lines of the battle against Muammar Gaddafi’s regime.” Excerpt:

In an interview with the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*, Mr al-Hasidi admitted that he had recruited “around 25” men from the Derna area in eastern Libya to fight against coalition troops in Iraq. Some of them, he said, are “today are on the front lines in Adjabiya”. Mr al-Hasidi insisted his fighters “are patriots and good Muslims, not terrorists,” but added that the “members of al-Qaeda are also good Muslims and are fighting against the invader”.

His revelations came even as Idriss Deby Itno, Chad’s president, said al-Qaeda had managed to pillage military arsenals in the Libyan rebel zone and acquired arms, “including surface-to-air missiles, which were then smuggled into their sanctuaries”.

Even though the LIFG is not part of the al-Qaeda organisation, the United

States military's West Point academy has said the two share an "increasingly co-operative relationship". In 2007, documents captured by allied forces from the town of Sinjar, showed LIFG emmbers made up the second-largest cohort of foreign fighters in Iraq, after Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this month, al-Qaeda issued a call for supporters to back the Libyan rebellion, which it said would lead to the imposition of "the stage of Islam" in the country.

Mr al-Hasidi admitted he had earlier fought against "the foreign invasion" in Afghanistan, before being "captured in 2002 in Peshwar, in Pakistan". He was later handed over to the US, and then held in Libya before being released in 2008.

US and British government sources said Mr al-Hasidi was a member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, or LIFG, which killed dozens of Libyan troops in guerrilla attacks around Derna and Benghazi in 1995 and 1996.

(4) [Libya: rebels without a hope?](#), Martin Ottmann, Bullets & Ballots — website of the School of International Relation at the U of Nottingham, 21 March 2011 — Excerpt:

... many hope the Libyan rebels will finish the job of removing Gaddafi from power on their own. As in Afghanistan in 2001, airstrikes could pave the way for an advance of rebel troops towards the capital. But are these hopes realistic? To answer this question you have to assess the military and political capabilities of the Libyan rebels, something I have done as part of my [PhD research](#) on rebels in sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the [International Institute of Strategic Studies \(IISS\)](#), the Libyan rebels possess only very moderate military means. ... The rebels also rely on taxis taking their troops to the frontline. This is no match for Gaddafi's well-equipped forces. Therefore, even if the rebels manage to beef up their military capabilities ... they will at best only be capable of holding on to their strongholds in Eastern Libya. Ultimately, this would result in a stalemate and cement a partition of the country.

However, as my research suggests, civil wars are not decided solely on the battlefield: the competition between government and rebels over [popular support is also of great importance](#) for the outcome of such a conflict. In the case of Libya, popular support for the rebels could lead to further defections of government units thereby decisively changing the military balance. The question is whether the rebels can create this support on a significant scale.

My research suggests that it is often the political leadership of a rebel movement and its population base that are the most important influences behind building popular support. Regarding the first factor, [the Libyan rebels appear to be considerably fragmented over political objectives and strategy](#). It is unclear whether they can formulate a coherent alternative able to muster widespread support. Moreover, a combination of obscure dissidents and former members of Gaddafi's ruling clique presently form the rebel leadership. It is questionable whether Libyans will be willing to put their fate in the hands of such men.

Finally, [it is vital to remember that Libyan politics often equates with tribal politics](#): loyalty and allegiance runs along tribal lines. This is something that might favour Gaddafi. As the rebel strongholds of Benghazi and Tobruk have opposed the Colonel's rule in the past, he might play the tribal card to divide his opponents. But even if he fails, tribal divisions mean it will be difficult for

the rebels to create widespread national support.

The Libyan rebels therefore, seem to lack the necessary political and military capabilities to remove Gaddafi from power. Hopes that the imposition of a no-fly-zone will lead to anything other than stalemate are based more on wishful Western thinking than rational analysis.

(5) "[Libyan rebels' weapons deficit](#)", International Institute of Strategic Studies, 8 March 2011 — Excerpt:

Fighting in Libya between pro- and anti-Gadhafi forces has preoccupied the world's media for the past few weeks. A completely clear picture of the relative balance of forces has not been available. However, image intelligence (IMINT) analysis of Libyan military bases can shed some light on the current situation and offer indicators as to what might follow.

... From satellite imagery, the differences between the military units stationed in the east of the country, which has traditionally been anti-Tripoli, and those in the west are stark. Apart from a few mechanised units in Benghazi and Tobruk, and a few armoured battalions near Albayda, rebel-controlled areas lack any substantial hardware with which to take on the pro-Gadhafi stronghold of Tripoli.

By comparison, a ring of forces is stationed in the south-eastern suburbs of Tripoli, with a large armoured formation of possibly brigade strength 50 kilometres south of the city. The pro-Gadhafi regions are also well garrisoned with artillery, anti-aircraft and mechanised formations.

... Clearly, however, the rebel forces are not without supplies. The large arms depots outside Benghazi (Ar Rajmah), Misratah and Ajdabiya should provide enough heavy machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and mortars for a light fighting force. There is also a large artillery depot in the Western Fwayhat district of Benghazi, stocked with what appears to be BM21 Grad multi-launch rocket systems. However, without proper planning and training, it would be difficult to bring these to bear in the eventual showdown at Tripoli.

From the disposition of forces, it is clear that Gadhafi has long neglected the military formations in the east; the dilapidated bases and installations there contrast sharply with the well-kept barracks and tank parks outside Tripoli. Thus far, the few armoured units deployed by the rebels have been obsolete T55 tanks, while pro-Gadhafi units are on the streets of the capital in relatively modern T72s. This goes a long way towards explaining why the momentum generated by the revolution has yet to overwhelm pro-regime forces.

The geographically dispersed nature of the uprising means a lack of proper frontlines. This has made normal military logistical support for either side difficult to maintain beyond basic fuel and ammunition supplies. Few large formations are being deployed by either side. Recent fighting around the strategic oil town of Ras Lanuf demonstrated this clearly, with only a few hundred participants on both sides.

As well as T55 tanks, rebel forces have employed some ZSU 23mm anti-aircraft guns and Type 63 107mm rocket launchers. The rebels have also been modifying civilian pick-up trucks by installing large-calibre machine guns on the back, generally referred to as 'technical's; some of the weapons seem to have been removed from armoured vehicles. Beside this, the various militias

and volunteers are equipped with an assortment of small arms, mortars and RPGs.

In turn, forces in Tripoli have employed T72 and T62 tanks, plus BMP1 infantry fighting vehicles, based around the capital. Pro-Gadhafi infantry have also used 'technicals'. Air assets used against rebel positions have so far included MiG23 Flogger and Mi-25/35 Hind attack helicopters. Self-propelled artillery guns such as the 2S1 have also been deployed on the roads towards Tripoli. These are considerably more powerful than anything the rebels can muster.

Although government forces appear to have an enormous armament advantage, the fighting so far shows they are lacking in morale. In recent skirmishes in small coastal towns the rebels have easily repelled the pro-government forces' largely uncoordinated attacks with the most rudimentary of weapons. The loyalty of the air force has also been called into question as many bombs have been reportedly dropped miles from their targets.

Even though the militias and volunteer groups are largely uncoordinated, a small group of former soldiers and officers have been attempting to organise a core of recruits trained in the fundamentals of warfare in Benghazi. The time needed to ready these men will have a tremendous effect on the final assault on Tripoli.

The other main concern for the rebels beside the lack of organisation is the lack of logistical support. Because of their reliance on civilian vehicles for the movement of men and equipment, rebel pushes towards government-controlled areas have been restricted to the main coastal roads. This means they can be flanked if the tracked mechanised forces of the government decide to bypass the roadblocks on the road to Benghazi.

(6) For more information

Studies about Libya:

1. ["Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records"](#), Joseph Felter (Lieutenant Colonel, former Special Forces, now Director of the CTC; [bio here](#)) and Brian Fishman (Instructor, [bio here](#)), the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, 19 December 2007

Posts about recent events in the Middle East:

1. [The Middle East scorecard](#), 18 March 2011
2. [Events in the Middle East expose the nature of US foreign policy. There is yet time to change before we hit the rocks.](#), 20 March 2011

Posts about Libya:

1. [Libya's people need uninvited infidel foreigners to save them!](#), 1 March 2011
2. ["You just have not seen enough people bleed to death"](#), 8 March 2011
3. [About attacking Libya - let's give this more thought than we did Afghanistan and Iraq](#), 6 March 2009
4. [Our geopolitical experts see the world with the innocent eyes of children \(that's a bad thing\)](#), 14 March 2011
5. [A war monger review, looking at the articles advocating a US war with Libya](#), 22 March 2011

6. [What will the world's tyrants learn from the Libyan War? Get nukes.](#), 25 March 2011

Posts about Egypt:

1. ["The Revolution Is Not Yet Over"](#), Yasmine El Rashidi, blog of the New York Review of Books, 23 February 2011
2. ["Volcano of Rage"](#), Max Rodenbeck, *New York Review of Books*, 24 February 2011
3. [Important information about the riots in Egypt](#), FM website, 30 January 2011
4. [Why do we fear the rioters in Egypt?](#), FM website, 30 January 2011
5. [Sources of information about the situation in Egypt](#), FM website, 6 February 2011

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