

# “Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State”

Translation and Analysis of IS  
Recruitment Propaganda for Libya



QUILLIAM

By Charlie Winter

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Quilliam is the world's first counter-extremism think tank, set up to address the unique challenges of citizenship, identity and belonging in a globalised world. Quilliam stands for religious freedom, equality, human rights and democracy. Challenging extremism is the duty of all responsible members of society. Not least because cultural insularity and extremism are products of the failures of wider society to foster a shared sense of belonging and to advance democratic values. Quilliam seeks to challenge what we think and the way we think. It aims to generate creative, informed and inclusive discussions to counter to the ideological underpinnings of terrorism, whilst simultaneously providing evidence-based recommendations to governments for related policy measures.

**For further information, contact:**

Email: [information@quilliamfoundation.org](mailto:information@quilliamfoundation.org)

Tel: +44 (0)207 182 7280

[www.quilliamfoundation.org](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org)

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## Introduction

In light of the recent release and circulation of a video depicting the execution of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians on a beach in Libya by militants claiming to be part of Islamic State (IS), international attention has zoned in on the country as a new realm of jihadist activity. To be sure, jihadism is not new to the country. For a long time now, Libya has been a hive of instability, a place where jihadist groups, tribal militias and criminal gangs have competed for hegemony amid the seemingly unsolvable standoff between the internationally recognised government based in Tobruk and the Tripoli-based General National Congress that claims legitimacy at the expense of the Tobruk government, with which it is effectively at war.

The situation in Libya is not binary, as it is sometimes portrayed. We must recognise that it is far more complicated than that. Militias have proliferated in the increasingly fragmented state in the wake of Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi's toppling four years ago. Some of them are jihadist, some are not. Some are affiliated to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, others are not. It is imperative that the incredible complexity of the situation in Libya is taken into account by policymakers and observers. No make sweeping characterisations should be made regarding the state of affairs in the country.

Amid this confusion, IS saw an opportunity, which it capitalised on with the release of "A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross", the execution video produced by IS's Al Hayat Media Centre. Immediately after its release, the international media's attention refocused from IS in Syria and Iraq to IS in Libya, where the group's presence has, for a long time, been a point of contention. Whatever the case, this was IS announcing, unambiguously and internationally, its existence in Libya. As such, the time when its presence could be swept under the political carpet has passed; jihadists operating under its banner now control a sizeable amount of support in Derna, Sirte and an-Nawfaliyah, the first of which is its current base of operations.

The establishment of the IS franchise in Libya is not a sudden occurrence. For months now, it has been apparent that certain jihadist groups in Libya, after pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, IS's self-proclaimed caliph, have been receiving assistance from the organisation. Among other things, their propaganda operations were almost entirely ceded over to the central IS propagandists. Moreover, rumours have abounded that senior IS figures, top jurist

Turki al-Bin'ali and former emir of Anbar province Abu Nabil al-Anbari among them, have visited Libya on outreach missions.

During this time, there has been a steady stream of pictures and audio messages trickling out of Libya – depictions of armed convoys bedecked in IS flags and da'wah meetings encouraging support for the so-called caliphate – things that have been enthusiastically circulated by IS supporters who are keen to exaggerate the group's ubiquity and menace. The recent release of the mass execution video, however, is the strongest proof yet that this support is not just superficial. Rather, it seems that IS's Libya contingent is more closely aligned with the group's central command than was widely thought.

## Motivations

In light of the above, it is imperative that we seek to understand the motivations of IS in Libya. Why expend so much time and effort establishing a presence there? Why not focus all resources – financial, military and logistical – in the environs of the seat of the caliphate, Syria and Iraq? It has been long suspected that the IS bureaucracy has looked upon Libya as a source of great potential due to its asset wealth, strategic location and the immense amount of weaponry still present there following the overthrow of al-Qadhafi. Now, thanks to a document circulated among IS supporters last month, it appears that those suspicions are well-founded.

In January, a prominent supporter of IS who claims to be in Libya uploaded a short essay, “Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State”.<sup>1</sup> In it, the author lays down the reasons why IS’s jihad must expand to the country. Importantly, the document, which has remained until now, untranslated in its Arabic-language form, is not something for a Western audience. Its content is not an attempt to intimidate. Rather, it is intended for a regional jihadist audience, written to convince other jihadists of the imperatives of assisting the IS mission in Libya. Though this does not give an official, Islamic State-sanctioned view on the importance of country to the caliphate, it does present a window onto the mind-set of the IS jihadist in Libya. Hence, it sheds light on some of the primary considerations, motivations and intentions of IS’s Libyan franchise.

While it is important that one does not take the content of the essay as sacrosanct – after all, it is propaganda intended to recruit jihadists to the IS cause – it is imperative that we understand what makes Libya an appealing destination for jihadist militants. Doing so will ensure that the gravity of the current situation is better understood.

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid giving the author undue notoriety, he will remain unnamed.

## Synopsis

In the document, the author:

- Opens with an expression of gratitude to God for bringing IS to Libya and to those jihadists who pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi last year.
- Laments the fact that many supporters of IS have misunderstood and underestimated the critical significance of Libya as a new “province” of the caliphate.
- Claims that, if Libya was properly exploited, “pressure on the land of the Caliphate in ash-Sham and Iraq” could be relieved significantly. As much as anything else, Libya could be the key to IS’s defence against the “Crusader coalition”.
- Lists the specific conditions which render this the case. He speaks of the “strategic geographic” location of Libya, the fact that it “looks upon the sea, the desert, mountains, and six states: Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia”.
- Notes that “it has a long coast and looks upon the southern Crusader states, which can be reached with ease by even a rudimentary boat”. Therefore, the opportunities that lie in the exploitation of human trafficking rings make Libya unparalleled as a launching platform for attacking European states and shipping lines.
- Spends much time discussing the abundance of light, medium and heavy munitions in Libya, both those that ended up in the hands of revolutionaries and those stockpiled by al-Qadhafi during his reign, in which he “squandered all Libya’s oil revenues – which ranged between thirty and forty five billion dollars a year – upon the purchase of weapons”.
- Draws attention to the fact that “one leak of [these munitions] from Libya to Mali enabled jihadist groups there to take over more than two thirds of the country in a very short amount of time”, something that is used to compound the immense potential that Libya has as a fomenter of IS power.
- Urgently calls upon jihadists to make their way to Libya as soon as possible, before inaction means that the weapons are “effectively surrender[ed] to the Crusaders”.
- Reiterates that Libya is a massive source of potential, but one that must be tapped into soon, as it will not last forever. If it is to be “the key to Egypt, the key to Tunisia, Sudan, Mali, Algeria and Niger too”, then IS supporters must mobilise now and act fast.

## Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

As with any document that surfaces on the internet, even if it can be tracked down to a prominent producer and propagator of IS material, the assertions made below must be understood for what they are – unofficial propaganda. Hence, none of what is written should be taken as absolute fact. However, to an extent, this is of arbitrary importance. What makes the document below important is the fact that it identifies the key characteristics of Libya that render it an appealing destination for Islamic State jihadists. By understanding these, we can better predict and challenge its trajectory in North Africa.

In light of the above, Quilliam recommends:

- Tackling this issue holistically. Terrorism is, by its very nature, asymmetric. Bombing Islamic State without having a concerted approach to tackling its funding, recruitment and extremist radicalisation of all kinds will not have lasting results.
- That states increase international cooperation to improve border security, crack down on arms smuggling and coordinate military responses to jihadist organisations, wherever they are located.
- That the Foreign and Commonwealth Office takes a long-term view to the causes of violent extremism in the Middle East and North Africa region and invest in counter-extremism measures as part and parcel of its counter-terrorism strategy.

## Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State



### [Introduction]

Thanks be to God Alone and may prayers and peace be upon the Prophet. Let us proceed:

Thanks be to God who revived for us the State of the Caliphate, the dawn of which was ushered on after many difficult years until, by the grace of God, it was brought to Libya by the mujahidin who answered the call to Righteousness and responded to the command of God and his Messenger in the necessity for union and avoidance of disunity when they pledged their allegiance to the Prince of the Believers and Caliph of Muslims, Sheikh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Hussaini al-Qurashi – may God protect him – and announced the blessed expansion of the State of the Caliphate to Libya.



As well as the harmonious social makeup of Libya, and the fact that 99% of [its population] is made up of Maliki Sunnis – aside from the Ibadhia minority – by the grace of God to Libya, God bestowed upon this country a strategic position and immense potential. These are things from which it would be possible to derive great benefits if they were efficiently exploited. Unfortunately, some supporters do not recognise the extent of the Libyan arena, the proliferation of variant weaponry within it, its geographic dimensions and its critical environs. Sufficed to say, Libya looks upon the sea, the desert, mountains, and six states: Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia.



### [Proximity to Europe]

Add to that the fact that it has a long coastline and looks upon the southern Crusader states, which can be reached with ease by even a rudimentary boat and note that the number of “illegal immigration” trips from this coast is massive, estimated to be as high as 500 people a day, as a low estimate. According to many [of these immigrants], it is easily possible to pass through Maritime Security Checkpoints and arrive in cities. If this was even partially exploited and developed strategically, pandemonium could be wrought in the southern Europe. It is even possible that there could be a closure of shipping lines because of the targeting of Crusader ships and tankers.

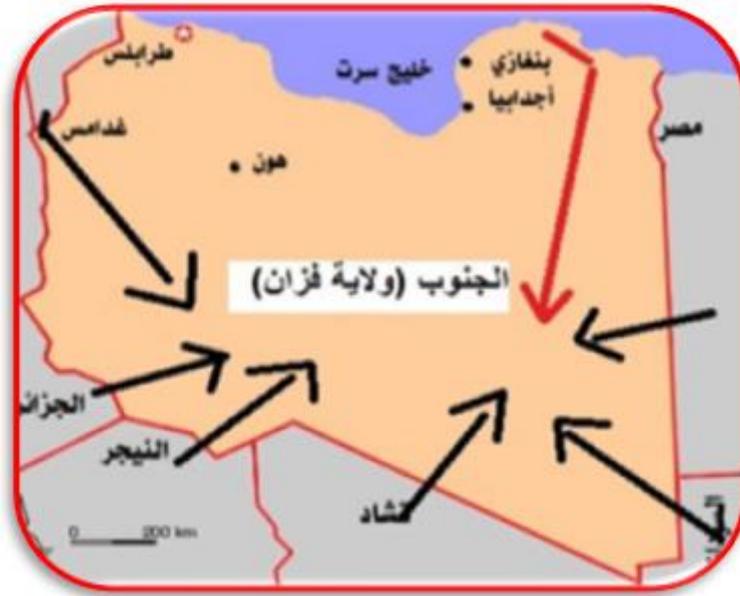


## [Munitions]

As for the weapons that are in Libya, if I was to try and describe to you the sheer amount of them, then it suffices to say that one leak of them from Libya to Mali enabled jihadist groups there to take over more than two thirds of the country in a very short amount of time. This is just the weapons that could be smuggled – imagine what remains. Furthermore, Mali does not even share a border with Libya. Just imagine if it did.

This should not come as a surprise: it is well known that the tyrant al-Qadhafi squandered all of Libya’s oil revenues – which ranged between 30 and 45 billion dollars a year – upon the purchase of weapons, armaments and stockpiles.

Consider, also, that, during the Libyan Revolution, the Crusader coalition bombarded one of the weapons warehouses that was controlled by the tyrant al-Qadhafi. The bombardment continued for a number of months, with explosions so big that the light from them was visible tens of kilometres away for a number of days. It might surprise you, my beloved brother, that despite all this, the bombardment did not completely destroy the stockpile. After the flames died down, large numbers of weapons were found there. This was only one store of many.



## [Geography]

The strategic location of Libya means that it could relieve the pressure being felt by the State of the Caliphate in Iraq and ash-Sham. It is distinguished by its huge size, enormous tracts of desert that are impossible to monitor, and mountain ranges that render aircrafts useless. It is very difficult for Crusader planes to monitor, in full, the Libyan landscape. This was rendered crystal clear by the inability the Crusader jets faced in limiting the movement of the forces of the apostate tyrant Mu’ammār al-Qadhafi in the days of the Libyan revolution. Therefore, we find them now planning a Crusader campaign and ground invasion in case there is further deterioration of their positions in Libya.

According to the Canadian newspaper *The National Post*, the greatest stockpile of weapons in the world is found on Libyan soil. It presents, in the words of the newspaper, “a grave threat to its neighbours”. The article went on to say that France could be forced to intervene on its own if it fails to garner international support like it did with Mali (for more on the French Crusader campaign on Libya, analysis and forecast for the next war, click here: [link]).

In a similar report, the American newspaper, *Newsweek*, claimed that: “Libya is the greatest repository for weapons in the Middle East”.

It was reported from the United Nations, as it is called by tyrants, that the number of weapons smuggled out of Libya could be as high as twenty million individual pieces since the fall of al-Qadhafi, including rockets, projectiles, guns, and small quantities of chemical compounds like yellow cake uranium, the latter of which was still present in Libya even after the cancellation of al-Qadhafi's nuclear programme.

My brothers, Libya, by the permission of God, is the key to Egypt, the key to Tunisia, Sudan, Mali, Algeria and Niger too. It is the anchor from which can be reached Africa and the Islamic Maghreb.

However, for this dream to become a reality we must move quickly – partial commitment to the cause will not suffice. If we forget this military arsenal, we effectively surrender the weapons to the Crusaders. This has already been attempted. The first time was during the Libyan revolution when a State Department team, along with 14 technical experts, managed to find more than twenty thousand surface to air missiles in Libya. It began steps to gather together SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles that were in the hands of the revolutionaries in various and, by this time, liberated places, even though they were under close guard. The experts destroyed as many as 375 of them.

There was also an American-Libyan plan to create a joint venture to sell what remained of the viable SAM-7 and anti-aircraft systems to a number of states.

After the death of al-Qadhafi, in just one month, American forces also took control of chemical weapons stockpiles, stealing them under the cover of its client, the Transitional Council. After a short period of time, it went on to gather the rest of the SAM-7 missiles and explode them in the desert, an event attended by a delegation from the American embassy.

## [Urgency]

All of these things indicate the fear that the Crusader West feels from weapons in Libya. Their efforts to destroy them – and destroy Libya – are evident in their attempts to fabricate wars and crises between tribes and cities. It is imperative that the mujahidin move to try to prevent the continuation of [the Crusader] plan and fix the differences between Libyans so that they may direct their energies towards the real enemy, the real tyrants, those who have as their masters the Crusaders. If that happens, which it will, if God permits it, then no force will stand in the way of the mujahidin. Not only will pressure on the land of the Caliphate in ash-Sham be relieved, but the territories of the Caliphate in ash-Sham, Iraq and Hijaz will be linked with those of their brothers in Libya and the Islamic Maghreb and the defeat of all regimes and tyrants in their way will be enabled. That is not difficult for God.

Written and compiled by the poor servant [name omitted]. For any suggestions or if you wish to contact me, use the link below:

[link]

Or on the [name omitted] blog.

[link]

You will find on the blog my writings on support for the Islamic State in Libya.

(Everything that I publish is a personal opinion and private derivation and is expressive only of my own views.)

(I ask God to bring benefit by that which I write and to forgive me for my mistakes. God is behind our intention.)