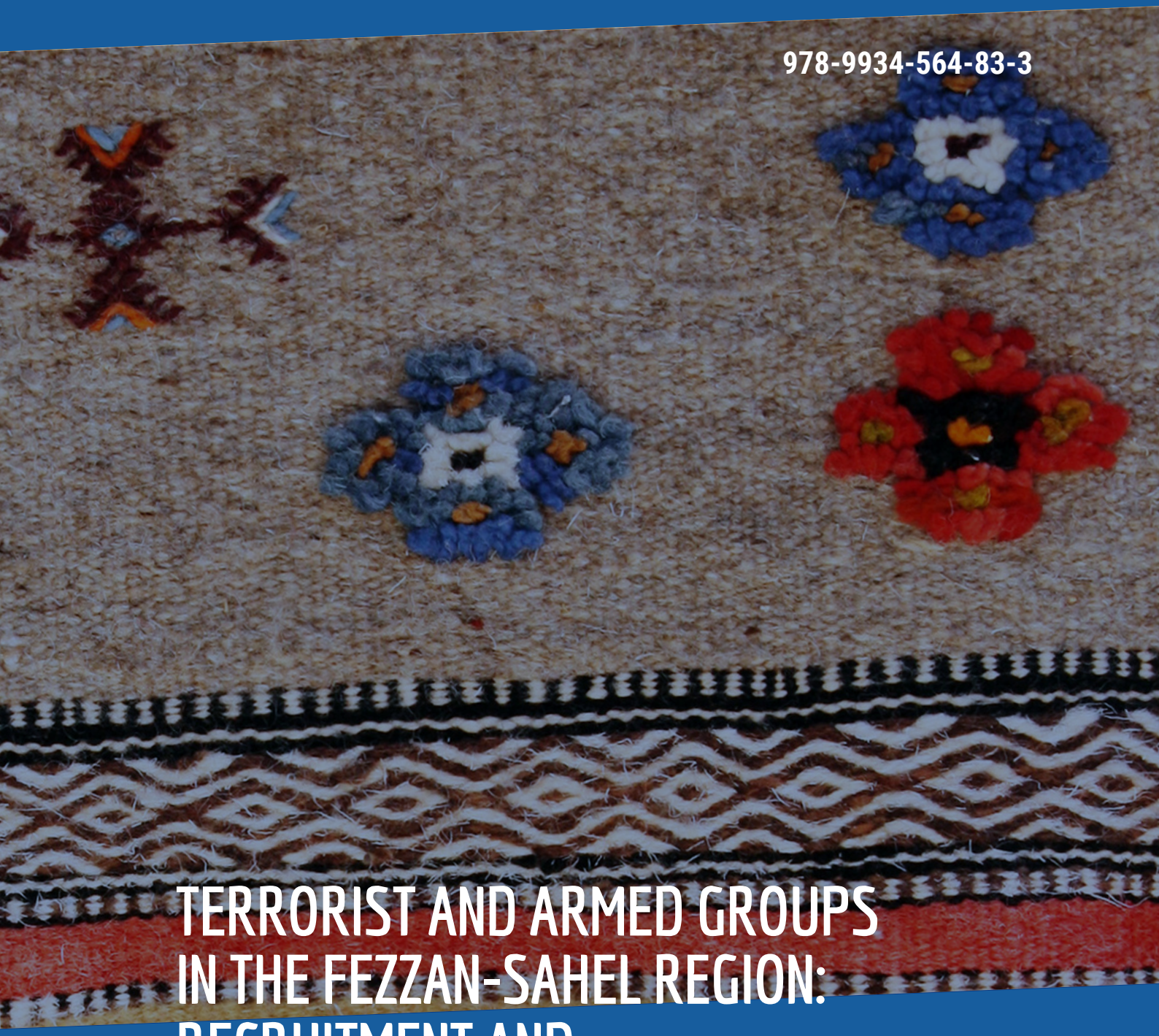
978-9934-564-83-3



TERRORIST AND ARMED GROUPS IN THE FEZZAN-SAHEL REGION: RECRUITMENT AND COMMUNICATION TACTICS

Published by the
NATO Strategic Communications
Centre of Excellence

ISBN: 978-9934-564-83-3

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Riga, December 2020

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INTRODUCTION

This report discusses terrorist and armed group activity in the Libyan Fezzan (southwestern Libya) as well as these groups' ties to local tribes. Since the downfall of Mu'ammar Qaddafi in 2011, Libya has become a hotspot for militias, criminal gangs, and jihadists.

The geographic focal points of terrorist groups are shifting, however. In the northern part of the country, the territorial concentrations of these groups were largely defeated by 2017; conversely, in the Fezzan and the neighbouring countries of the Sahel, jihadi groups have proven resilient.[1] In spite of international airstrikes and attacks by some Libyan forces (notably, the Libyan National Army or LNA), jihadi groups have survived, adapted their communication tactics to the local context and even engaged in lucrative criminal activities across the Fezzan-Sahel borders, further blurring the lines between jihadist and criminal networks.[2]

Concomitantly, crime has skyrocketed across the region, reflecting the weakness of state institutions. The main illicit businesses pursued across the southern Libya border are robbery, car-jacking, kidnapping for ransom, and the smuggling of goods and people. This report begins with an overview of the affiliations of some of the main ethnic groups and tribes in southern Libya and their involvement in terrorism and people-smuggling. It then discusses the specific recruitment tactics and people-smuggling activities of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) and ISIS in southern Libya, highlighting their relevance for the international community and NATO.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF SOUTHERN LIBYAN ETHNIC GROUPS AND MAJOR TRIBES IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The Libyan Tebu

The Tebu (present in Libya, Niger, and Chad) are an ethnic group that has not historically been linked with extremists. Faced with a near-total absence of government support since 2011, compounded by decades of Qaddafi-era marginalisation, the Tebu have developed a largely self-governing community in their traditional population centres in southern Libya. Although violent criminal activities and extremist leanings are widely culturally condemned – and involvement with these can lead to punishment or being ostracised by the community – the smuggling of people and goods are notable exceptions and are culturally condoned.

The Tebu are known to have been deeply involved with people-smuggling via the Niger-Tummo-Qatrun-Sebha migrant route into Libya.[3] Since 2014, this has been the most utilised route and it had remained active until very recently.

At the border crossing, Tebu forces used to register the entry and exit passing of vehicles, charging 'customs duties' for merchandise. Once merchants and smugglers crossed the border into Niger, they also had to pay off government forces there – which indicates the degree of embeddedness of smuggling activities within the broader regional economy. In spring of 2020, the government of Niger announced the closing of the border due to the threat of Covid-19, thus temporarily halting the 'formalised' system of migrant crossings.

Some smugglers have continued to operate by taking a modified route that avoids the Nigerien checkpoints, but local sources say these cases are few.[4] Mid-summer is also the slowest season for desert crossings as the heat makes the journey difficult and dangerous, with vehicles more likely to suffer mechanical breakdowns. Some Tebu armed groups are also involved in smuggling goods (though this is more traditionally the work of the Werfalla and Qadhadhfa tribes). For example, the Tebu Desert Shield Battalion has set up monetary collection and distribution mechanisms that emulate formal salary systems, which has allowed for relative income stability.[5]

A Tebu source from southern Libya informed the authors that some Tebu had joined extremist groups in the south, but that the numbers were small.[6] 'After the conflict (in February 2019), here in Murzuq and the surrounding areas, there were some AFRICOM airstrikes. At that time, there were only Tebu in Murzuq which means some Tebu were involved (with Islamist extremism),' the source said. 'But I don't think it's ideology-based. They don't believe in the ISIS ideology or other radicalised ideologies, but rather join radicals for money or from wanting to be in a position of power to take revenge. The general opinion among most Tebu is that they stand against all kinds of radical Islam.' One specialist called the relationship between the Tebu and the jihadi networks 'a coincidental one' that largely 'blurs into local criminal networks.'[7]

Some Libyan Tebu were part of Ibrahim Jadhran's Petroleum Facilities Guard. This militia (formerly occupying Libya's main oil crescent export terminals) is alleged to currently occupy strategic sites in southern Libya. Jadhran is from a family with deep ties to extremism, and has frequently chosen to ally with extremist groups when facing a common enemy. He is currently aligned with the defunct GNC and the Benghazi Defence Brigades, but the exact location and activities of his militia, likely to still include some Tebu fighters, remain unclear at this time.

The Libyan Tuareg

The Tuareg are an ethnic group of nomadic Amazigh who have long been accused of having links to extremist groups, particularly al-Qaeda: Tuareg 'devoutness' apparently leaves them more vulnerable to radicalisation than some other southern ethnic groups or tribes. Most Libyan Tuareg armed groups (possibly excluding those aligned to al-Qaeda) are affiliated with, or under nominal command of, Qaddafi-era commander Ali Kanna – the commander of the Government of National Accord (GNA)'s Southern Military Region.

> Although violent criminal activities and extremist leanings are widely culturally condemned – and involvement with these can lead to punishment or being ostracised by the community – the smuggling of people and goods are notable exceptions and are culturally condoned.

Reportedly, he seeks to extract money for the south from the GNA. However, because the state exerts such little control in southern Libya, Libyans are reportedly suspicious about how these funds are directed. Some foreign Tuareg fighters are believed to have secured Libyan nationality. Documents have also showed that Kanna had attempted to secure Libyan nationality for 83 Malian Tuareg back in 2011.[8]

The Tuareg are understood to have been deeply involved with people-smuggling via the Niger-Ghat-Sebha migrant route into Libya in the past. While this migrant route had historically been the most active, including during the Qaddafi era, it fell largely into disuse during the 2014-2015 Ubari conflict, which left the road to Sebha blocked, precluding onward travel toward coastal Libya. People-smuggling then shifted to the Niger-Tummo-Qatrun-Sebha route, which remains the most used. It is unclear to what extent the Niger-Ghat-Sebha migrant route is currently used.

It is thought that Libyan Tuareg with extremist affiliations are more likely to side with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) rather than with ISIS.[9] AQIM's main source of funding derives from kidnapping for ransom. In 2012, it was estimated that 90 percent of AQIM's revenue came from this source and that Tuareg-directed kidnappings were critical.[10] The overall amount of this activity may be decreasing, with the remaining instances localised to Libya.

In recent years, Algeria has focused on hunting down and killing Tuareg and AQIM extremists,[11] rendering Libya a favorable location for known or wanted extremists. This can be seen in the case of former al-Qaeda military commander, smuggler and weapons dealer Mokhtar Belmokhtar. After leaving al-Qaeda (possibly due to expulsion for insubordination), Belmokhtar formed his own radical group Al-Mulathameen (the Masked Brigade), which has been implicated in the attack on Algeria's In Aménas gas facility that resulted in the killing of 39 hostages.

Sentenced to death in absentia by Algeria on counts of terrorism and murder, Belmokhtar has long been believed to reside in southern Libya and has been targeted there by air-strikes (e.g. by the United States in 2015 and by France in 2016).[12] Belmokhtar is believed to have previously had an acrimonious relationship with ISIS. It is not known if he is dead or alive.

The Hassouna

The Hassouna are one of the largest Arab tribes in the South and are widely viewed as an important 'neutral' tribe in the Fezzan region. Members of this tribe were successfully deployed as a mediation and peacekeeping force to end the conflict between the Tebu and the Tuareg in Ubari – despite their animosity toward both groups under the Qaddafi period. The Hassouna are known to contain extremist elements, partly by the virtue of their sheer size and diversity.

There are two notable extremists from the tribe: 1) the 'ISIS Mufti' of Sirte, Fawzi al-Ayatt al-Hasnawi, was captured by Bunyan al-Marsous (BAM) in Sirte and interviewed on local television.[13] He is believed to still be in a Misrata prison. 2) Abdel-Moneim Salem Khalifa al-Hassnawi (AKA Abu Talha) is currently thought to lead the radical elements of the Hassouna tribe. He is said to have strong relationships with Mokhtar Belmokhtar and senior personnel in AQIM, and he reportedly established the 'al-Hassouna Shura Council' to fight against LNA forces in 2016.[14] Abu Talha's current location and activities are unknown and there are reports that he has been killed. If he has died, it is likely that another radical member of the same tribe has taken his place.

The Hassouna are understood to have had some involvement with people-smuggling and checkpoint extortion, particularly while the Niger-Ghat-Sebha route remained functional.[15]

RECRUITMENT AND CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES BY EXTREMIST GROUPS IN SOUTHERN LIBYA

LIFG

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is an al-Qaeda affiliated group with members in Libya and beyond. Numerous members have been very active in the political and military spheres in post-2011 Libya, with several holding positions of power and influence. Although technically disbanded, the group is widely viewed within Libya as an active, powerful, and dangerous entity.

The remnants of LIFG retain a network of contacts in the south. Relations between the LIFG and Libya's southern regions are understood to have grown stronger post-2011 under Abdel Wahab Qaid's leadership (AKA Abu Idris al-Libi[16]). Qaid was one of the last LIFG members to be released from prison in the Qaddafi era during the first days of the 2011 uprising, after spending 16 years in prison. Furthermore, he has been accused of being a high-ranking member of al-Qaeda. His brother Abu Yahya al-Libi, killed in a drone attack in Pakistan in 2012, was the deputy head of al-Qaeda under Ayman Zawahri.[17]

> Although technically disbanded, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is widely viewed within Libya as an active, powerful, and dangerous entity.

Qaid was a member of the General National Congress (GNC) while essentially running the LIFG's clandestine organization in Libya. During Qaid's leadership of the group, the financial and recruitment ties between coastal Libya and the Fezzan were strong.

Qaid was also the head of the border guard for southern Libya. Security officials there have claimed that he was given a large amount of money by the GNC to establish comprehensive border security, which had lapsed after security personnel fled in 2011. They said he visited the South (circa 2012/2013) and made a video recording of a small group of armed guards with weapons and vehicles, claiming they represented the new border security force that he had established. However, this video was filmed in the desert around either Murzuq or Ubari and was described by the security officials as fake.[18] The vehicles, uniformed guards, and weapons were left with Qaid, and according to the security officials, none of the funds he received from the GNC ever reached the border regions. It is not known where this money was spent but with respect to his time heading southern border security, other sources claim that Qaid reportedly supported the establishment of training camps for extremists in southern Libya. Following this 'border security video' farce, which was widely known in the South, Qaid was no longer welcome in his home area.[19]

Even since Qaid's eviction, there remain links between extremist groups in southern Libya and extremist-leaning militias on the coast (those operating in Sabrata and Zawiyya are said to be implicated), ensuring an ample supply of funds.[20] A militia headed by an LIFG member known as Abu Obeidi guards the Zawiyya refinery. It is reported that Abu Obeidi has been able to maintain direct connections to the borders both with Tunisia and in the South, but specific routes and activities are not known. If true, such alleged links are most likely kept extremely clandestine because militias in Zawiyya and Sabrata are currently aligned with the GNA.

ISIS

Recruitment among migrants

At the peak of the expansion of ISIS, the group had a massive international recruitment campaign, mainly through the Internet and through international connections. ISIS leaders moved into Libya from the outside, consequently, the structure of both recruiting and staffing/ leadership was internationally-driven. At present, because of ISIS's geographical isolation, its international dimension is significantly weaker. From late 2015 onward, evidence started emerging that ISIS in Libya was relying on sub-Saharan migrants entering Libya to swell its ranks. Some were captured at gunpoint and forced to join ISIS, while others were recruited with promises of money, either upon or prior to arrival in Libya.[21] It was framed as an attractive promise to migrants: 'You can stay here, we have money, you can get assistance'.[22]

When ISIS was active around Sirte, it recruited migrants based around Sebha, usually collecting them via specific drivers. One civilian driver in Sirte was unknowingly employed to collect ISIS migrants and instructed to take a very specific and unusual route through small desert roads, avoiding checkpoints, specifically around Sebha. The migrants he was tasked with collecting had been separated from the others. He was paid much more than the standard rate for this job and when he realised that they were ISIS, he became scared and regretted his involvement.[23]

In 2018, two years after the defeat of ISIS in Sirte[24], the group continued to boost its ranks with migrants, according to Libyan security officials: 'Illegal immigrants trying to reach Europe come to Libya looking for money and they get good money from ISIS. So according to our intelligence reports, the numbers of hidden ISIS fighters are steadily increasing with these foreign fighters,' Colonel Ali Faida, then-commander of the Libyan forces securing Sirte told the Middle East Eye.[25]

This notion was supported by an illegal immigration official working near Sebha. 'There are still terrorists and radicals coming into Libya. ISIS dispersed all over the desert in all different directions and the threat they pose is very high,' said illegal immigration official General Mohammed al-Tamimi, who heads a checkpoint north of Sebha. 'ISIS in the South are mostly new migrant recruits and those who fled from Sirte and escaped to Jufra and further south. They lurk around the road from Sebha to Jufra and set up fake checkpoints when they run out of stuff. They are quiet when they have supplies.'[26] Al-Tamimi said local forces were trying to identify local ISIS sleeper cells, and he described existing ISIS forces in the desert as a mix of Libyans and foreigners, mainly from sub-Saharan African countries. It is likely that this situation remains the same today. An individual with close ties to southern Libya said, 'there are definitely still radicals hiding among migrants, crossing the desert and also crossing the sea'[27].

Most Libyan people-smugglers work solely for money, conceiving of their work as merely

transportation from point A to point B, and it is likely that they (especially those using the popular Niger-Tummo-Qatrun-Sebha route) have no knowledge of whether and when, they are transporting radicals. According to smugglers and security officials in the South, in 2016, Libya's border with Sudan was the route most used by ISIS, and it was there that radicals, including from Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan, entered Libya. Sudanese ISIS fighters are apparently preferred to other African migrants because of their fluency in Arabic. A former forced Nigerian ISIS recruit in Libya said there were many Sudanese ISIS fighters among those he was forced to train alongside[28].

'There are no visa requirements for Syrians entering Sudan and the Sudanese government pushes them towards the border, encouraging them to cross into Libya,' (Special Forces soldier Ibrahim Barka) Issa said. 'They include criminals, Islamists, and terrorist elements'[29].

The Sudanese border was then the most expensive migrant route into Libya, costing approximately $600 more per person than the Niger-Tummo-Qatrun-Sebha route. Yet, it is possible that the situation at this border has altered with Sudan's change of government. The new Prime Minster Abdulla Hamdok said in December 2019 that his government was 'joining hands with the rest of the world to fight (terrorism)'.[30]

Identifying long-standing foreign/migrant ISIS fighters may be difficult, as it is believed that some were given Libyan ID numbers and passports when ISIS controlled Sirte in 2015. According to a Sirte official, the first government office taken by ISIS was the passport office which they occupied for a week, before the computerised system used for issuing passports was shut down remotely by the main institution in Tripoli. The official said he believed that during that week as many as 100 fake passports could have been issued to ISIS fighters.[31]

General recruitment tactics and strategies in Libya

Since 2017, jihadi concentration in Libya has become localised in the South. This has allowed these groups to benefit from the area's lack of governance and the illicit enrichment opportunities previously described in this report.

ISIS recruitment across Libya has previously been carried out in several ways. Youth have been targeted through the distribution of literature and videos (often circulated on USB sticks or computer discs) and promises of guns, women, and money. Older people have been introduced to ISIS in mosques run by radical preachers, especially those of Wahabi philosophy. Communities disenfranchised and marginalised following 2011 (mainly pro-Qaddafi or Qaddafi-era figures, including in Sirte) were offered the opportunity to regain some power and carry weapons.

Since 2017, due to widespread knowledge of the reality of ISIS atrocities[32], recruitment strategies have changed, and ISIS is reported to now be targeting poorer communities with promises of money. This is likely to be particularly true of southern Libya, where many live in poverty. Due to ongoing economic

> Due to ongoing economic problems people in desperate financial circumstances are more likely to turn to crime, leaving them potentially more vulnerable to ISIS recruitment. It is likely that, alongside financial incentives, recruitment and radicalisation may also operate under tribal pressure.

problems – job opportunities are scarce, government-issued wages are routinely paid months late, food and fuel prices have risen dramatically, and fuel remains in short supply – people in desperate financial circumstances are more likely to turn to crime, leaving them potentially more vulnerable to ISIS recruitment. It is likely that, alongside financial incentives, recruitment and radicalisation may also operate under tribal pressure. According to well-placed sources in southern Libya, the most effective way to reduce the presence of sleeper cells and minimise the danger of radicalisation or recruitment by extremist groups would be investment in southern Libya.[33] As long as local communities continue to be neglected and marginalised by Libya's rival governments and the international community, remaining poverty-stricken and disenfranchised, they will be left vulnerable to recruitment or radicalisation.

Online recruitment by ISIS in Libya

There is a plethora of literature on ISIS's online recruitment in Syria and Iraq, with less focus on Libya.[34] When ISIS decided to take advantage of the situation in Libya, the first online activity was the release of an online propaganda piece titled 'Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State' (in Arabic and English), which explained the significance of Libya to the Islamic State caliphate. This was directed mainly at a regional audience to 'draw new recruits from abroad as well as within Libya'.[35]

While it has decreased since the expulsion of ISIS from Sirte in 2016, online recruitment is still used by the group to target Libyans. Research suggests that ISIS adapts its messaging in accordance with the local context to resonate with target audiences. In Libya, ISIS relies on exploiting civil conflict as well as on 'fomenting fissures within its enemies' ranks'.[36] For example, ISIS applied this strategy to the GNA-aligned coalition

Jamaat Fajr Libya (Libya Dawn Coalition) to aggravate more divisions within the group. An analysis of ISIS propaganda targeting Libya showed that the narrative of 'the state' is central. The propaganda frequently showcases daily life under the caliphate and describes the societal values and lifestyle to recruit more followers/fighters.[37] In addition to propaganda pieces, ISIS also uses victories (such as ground advances towards Sirte) as a symbol to attract Libyan as well as regional recruits. Online recruitment in Libya relies on the 'symbolic demonstration of power'.[38]

There are three official ISIS media bureaus in Libya that are in charge of the online messaging production located in Barqah, Fezzan, and Tripolitania. However, the extent to which any of these groups remain active is now questionable.

Presence of radical sleeper cells, including ISIS, in southern Libya

During the 2014-15 Tebu-Tuareg war in Ubari, the Tuareg were widely reported to have enlisted AQIM fighters into their ranks. Although Ubari is said to be safe for local civilian movement, and Tuareg residents fiercely deny any presence of AQIM, radical elements are said to still live in Ubari's Telakeen district. Local (LNA) and international airstrikes against alleged radicals have been carried out in and around Ubari.[39]

In the Ghudduwa area between Murzuq and Sebha, there are hundreds of farms and some of these are said to be occupied by radical sleeper cells. There may well be sleeper cells in other areas of southern Libya. Furthermore, before ISIS took control of Sirte and the surrounding area, farmers and herders saw militants using heavy machinery to bury supplies (of unknown nature) in desert areas south of the oil crescent. These supplies may be used by sleeper cells, either now or in the future.

After being driven from territory they held in Benghazi, Derna, and Sirte in late 2016 and early 2017, ISIS fighters are known to have fled south. In 2018, Libyan security forces then controlling Sirte – and affiliated with the GNC – admitted that they had lacked the necessary resources to hunt down these ISIS fighters. A tribal elder from the Sirte area told the Middle East Eye in 2018 that 'militant elements, including remnants of ISIS and al-Qaeda operatives, were occupying an expansive stretch, from the outskirts of the pro-Muammar Qaddafi stronghold of Bani Walid, to the southern al-Jufra area, and east to the edge of the oil crescent, south of the fiercely contested oil export terminals of Brega and Ras Lanuf'.[40]

This territory has subsequently been largely occupied by LNA forces, which has pushed ISIS sleeper cells further into the desert and mountainous regions. For example, in the Harouj mountains located south-east of Jufra, the tough terrain makes it largely impossible for ground forces to track them down.

According to some reports, there also remains a presence of radical sleeper cells of unknown affiliation (AQIM, ISIS or other) in other parts of southern Libya[41]. These remnants are not strong enough to 'control and tax' communities, but they have been reported to extract money in random operations.

THE IMPACT OF JIHADI STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

Based on the data presented above, two main relevant trends can be identified. The first is the evolution of jihadi communication strategy from ideology-focused communication to one increasingly focused on material needs. This constitutes a more 'opportunistic'[42] recruitment strategy. The second is a localisation of narrative as opposed to the traditional internationally-driven propaganda.

The first trend highlights the embeddedness of jihadi narratives and activities within regional business activities – licit and illicit. Jihadi proselytisation exploits the social and economic context and occurs more often de visu than online – though web propaganda remains present. Jihadists promise material benefits in exchange for a superficial ideological allegiance. Italian sources revealed that this propaganda strategy tends to further legitimise human trafficking, perceived as an acceptable (and profitable) business opportunity by a new generation of Fezzanese and Sahelis. These groups are ready to provide logistical services along the smuggling routes – not least because human trafficking is apparently less risky than drug or arms trafficking.[43]

The second trend highlights what an Italian CT official called an 'Africanisation' of jihad, including its leadership.[44] The new jihadi narrative exploits not only local grievances, but also local political rivalries. It is accompanied

by a pragmatic policy of alliances – including through marriage – which might favour the integration of jihadists into the local tribal system. Jihadi propaganda at times exploits political divisions at the national level (i.e. between competing governments), and at times targets local competitors by exacerbating fissures between local groups. For example, Tebu armed groups systematically discriminate against non-Tebu groups, offering special rates for Tebu merchants and smugglers.[45] Some jihadi cells have allegedly reinforced this dynamic against common competitors (such as Nigerien smugglers), possibly with the overarching purpose of being accepted by the Tebu of Fezzan as part of their community.[46]

This reveals a major difference between the Middle Eastern jihadi and the North African–Sahelian jihadi organisations. In the former region, jihadi organisations participate in bloody civil wars, and are known for their extremely violent behaviour toward local civilian populations and minorities. In Libya, although jihadi organisations did engage in violent confrontations with each other, especially in the case of ISIS versus al-Qaeda loyalists, these clashes never matched the strife in the Middle East and were confined to the coastal regions. Furthermore, no large-scale massacre or extreme violence against civilians has been documented in the Fezzan and Sahel regions. When such events occur, they are exceptional, showing that even those jihadi groups that still claim affiliations with their Middle Eastern counterparts, usually continue to be administered as local organisations following their own objectives and communication strategies.[47]

CONCLUSION

This report has analysed the role of southern Libyan ethnic groups and tribes in fuelling recruitment and financing of extremist groups, including through their involvement in people-smuggling. The latter remains a lucrative and essential business for ethnic and tribal groups, as well as for extremist organisations.

The report finds that the Libyan Tebu and Tuareg are heavily involved in people-smuggling, with the Arab Hassouna involved to a lesser degree. Conversely, it is understood that the Tuareg and Hassouna are far more likely to join ISIS than the Tebu. Furthermore, the report further concludes that the LIFG, despite being officially disbanded, is perceived in Libya as still active, and the group maintains links to the South, which are in turn connected to smuggling hubs along Libya's coastline. ISIS in Libya currently offers payment as a key recruiting tool, with online recruitment propaganda in Libya relying on 'symbolic demonstrations of power.' Overall, in the context of statelessness and poverty prevailing in southern Libya, jihadi networks tend to exploit Libyan fragmentation, both in terms of politics and narratives, prioritising business opportunities over ideology while also trying to infiltrate local communities and attract marginalised youths.

One of our knowledgeable interlocutors called these transformations 'hybrid terrorism' – that is, jihadi recruitment and networks adopting a distinct socio-economic/mercantile focus.[48] It follows that a greater understanding of the local context is crucial to move past the outdated 'containment' approach still prevalent among the international

community.[49] International players and organisations with strategic interests in Libya and the surrounding region – such as NATO – need to map local tensions and priorities in order to understand and foresee how jihadi networks can profit from them. Grievances and tensions in various areas of Libya may sound similar to external observers, but the extent of their impact may vary from group to group. Engagement with Libyan and non-Libyan NGOs and CSOs, as well as with Libyan local authorities is therefore critical. At the same time, without a strong international commitment to tackling the economic drivers of the ongoing conflict at the national and regional levels, parts of the country – the Fezzan above all – will remain a breadbasket for extremist and criminal groups.

Lastly, although socioeconomic factors and the provision of utilities will remain paramount from a messaging perspective, southern communities (especially the Tebu, Tuareg, and Hassouna) nurse grievances of being ignored by Libyan politicians and the international community alike. As major international conferences and discussions are regularly held about the military situation in coastal Libya, the South of the country remains neglected. Any form of multilateral engagement, such as hosting a conference addressing economic grievances in the South or inviting major southern factions to participate along with the GNA and LNA at international summits, would send positive signals for these communities and potentially stem the flow of youth towards criminality and extremism.

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Prepared and published by the
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