



Libya: Now What?

“We came. We saw. He died,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said upon hearing the news, borrowing a slightly modified version of the famous phrase attributed to Roman emperor Julius Caesar. Western leaders and lawmakers rushed to release public statements hailing the “success” and “liberation” of Libya to the press.

Tyrant as “Important Ally”

But Gadhafi wasn’t always the enemy. In fact, despite decades of supporting terror and murdering dissidents, his regime was considered an “important ally” in the U.S. terror war as recently as late 2009. And according to an American diplomatic cable from Tripoli released by WikiLeaks, the bond was only getting stronger.



A high-level U.S. delegation that included several senior Senators, such as John McCain and Joe Lieberman, visited the despot himself, singing his praises, boasting about training his military officers in America, and begging for a closer bilateral relationship between the two governments. Senator McCain even promised to seek out more American “security” equipment for the regime.

In 2006, then-U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hailed the “Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya” as “a model” for other governments to emulate. While announcing that the regime was being welcomed back to the international community, Rice also praised Gadhafi’s “excellent cooperation in response to common global threats faced by the civilized world.”

Western leaders of all stripes flocked to Tripoli to praise the Libyan tyrant. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair forged a particularly close bond with the despot. *Time* magazine wrote an article explaining to confused Americans “Why Gaddafi’s Now a Good Guy.” And President George W. Bush even called him up for a friendly chat.

Even a decade ago — before Gadhafi really agreed to give up his Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programs — Western intelligence agencies, including the CIA, had a cozy relationship with the regime. According to a report in the *New York Times* based on documents found in Libya during the civil war, the U.S. government sent numerous suspects to the regime for “interrogation” despite its well-known use of brutality and torture.

Back then, the Libyan government was helping the West to pursue Islamic extremists, many of whom were also waging “Jihad” against Gadhafi. But by 2011, those same Muslim radicals — some intimately linked to al-Qaeda, others who had been imprisoned in Guantanamo or tortured by the U.S. government — were being armed and trained by the West.

Gadhafi Becomes the Enemy

“Revolution” was in the air. Citizens in Tunisia, Egypt, and other Middle Eastern and North African



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nations were apparently rising up spontaneously against their oppressive masters. Then, on February 17, it spread to Benghazi, one of Libya's most important cities.

Exactly what happened remains in dispute. According to the official narrative at the time, Gadhafi hired mercenaries to brutally massacre innocent civilian protesters asking for "democracy." His air force, meanwhile, indiscriminately dropped bombs on Libyan civilians. Among the most astounding claims, made by U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice, Gadhafi gave his forces "Viagra" to go on a "rape-spree." Genocide was sure to follow, Obama insisted.

Nearly all of those allegations were later shown to be false. The Russian military said it was monitoring Libyan air space and no such aerial bombings took place. Human-rights investigators found that the "mercenaries" were actually just regular Libyan soldiers. Claims that civilians were deliberately targeted were also proven false, with the *New York Times* writing that the rebels felt "no loyalty to the truth in shaping their propaganda." Even U.S. military and intelligence officials later conceded that the preposterous "Viagra" claims were unfounded.

Gadhafi, on the other hand, had a much different account. He claimed drug-fueled al-Qaeda terrorists and foreign powers were terrorizing the civilian population, attacking police and military installations, and generally wreaking havoc across Eastern Libya. Appearing on TV, he vowed that there would be "no mercy" in crushing the insurgency. But though barely reported in the Western media, Gadhafi also offered an escape route for insurgents via Egypt and amnesty to rebels who put down their weapons.

The evidence favors Gadhafi's version of events. Of course, Gadhafi's past record of human rights abuses does make his claims suspect, to say the least. But how about the veracity of the rebels? As *The New American* reported early on, numerous current and former al-Qaeda leaders — as well as other affiliated extremists who boasted of having battled U.S. soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan — were largely leading the rebellion. And they had been armed and trained by foreign powers including the U.S. government well before the "international community" officially intervened.

"Evidence is now in that President Barack Obama grossly exaggerated the humanitarian threat to justify military action in Libya," noted University of Texas public affairs professor Alan Kuperman, an expert on humanitarian intervention, in a piece for the *Boston Globe*.

Consider: "Misurata's population is roughly 400,000. In nearly two months of war, only 257 people — including combatants — have died there. Of the 949 wounded, only 22 — less than 3 percent — are women," Kuperman explained. "If Khadafy [sic] were indiscriminately targeting civilians, women would comprise about half the casualties."

War on Gadhafi

But it didn't matter that Gadhafi's story was (oddly enough) probably closer to the truth than the Western narrative — the war propaganda had already taken on a life of its own. The United Nations Security Council hastily convened on March 17. And with five abstentions, it approved Resolution 1973, which purported to authorize a "no-fly zone" and "all necessary measures" to "protect civilians." That was Obama's cue.

"Actions have consequences, and the writ of the international community must be enforced," Obama declared two days later during a visit to Brazil. "Today I authorized the armed forces of the United States to begin a limited military action in Libya in support of an international effort to protect Libyan civilians. That action has now begun."



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Without consulting Congress — let alone obtaining a declaration of war, which Obama himself admitted was required while on the campaign trail — the President committed U.S. forces to a UN mission that was supposed to last days or weeks, not months. Lawmakers on both sides of the aisle exploded. But Hillary Clinton assured them that the administration would ignore Congress anyway.

Days came and went as NATO began to drop bombs — sometimes on civilians and key civil infrastructure. The weeks quickly turned into months. Obama and other Western leaders demanded that Gadhafi step down so that he could be prosecuted for war crimes at the “International Criminal Court.” But by mid-October — tens of thousands of Western air sorties later — Gadhafi’s forces were still fighting in Western Libya.

Al-Qaeda & Co. Become Allies

As Gadhafi became public enemy number one, other veteran foes of the U.S. government suddenly went from dangerous terrorists to democratic “freedom fighters.” Most prominent among the terror groups that became Western allies was the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

According to a 2007 study entitled “Al Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq” by the U.S. military, the organization had an “increasingly cooperative relationship with al-Qa’ida, which culminated in the LIFG officially joining al-Qa’ida on November 3, 2007.” Before that, former CIA boss George Tenet warned the U.S. Senate in 2004 that al-Qaeda-linked groups like the LIFG represented “one of the most immediate threats” to American security.

The LIFG was still named on the U.S. State Department’s most recent list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, released on September 15, 2011. Ironically, this would make the Obama administration complicit in unlawfully providing material support to terrorist groups — a very serious crime for regular citizens. And even though ignorance is no excuse, the U.S. government admitted early on it knew what was happening. NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe Admiral James Stavridis, for example, told a Senate committee in the first month of the conflict that there were “flickers” of al-Qaeda within the Libyan rebellion.

But in the battle to bring down the Gadhafi regime, it did not matter. Western powers were literally arming, training, organizing, and offering air support to the very same jihadists who just a few years earlier were killing American troops. There are countless examples, but three will suffice to prove the point:

Abdelhakim Belhaj: Before leading his powerful militia against Gadhafi and being appointed the chief of Tripoli’s rebel Military Council, Belhaj was the co-founder and leader of the notorious LIFG. Eventually the terror “Emir,” as he has been called, was arrested and tortured as an American prisoner in the terror war. In 2004, according to reports, he was transferred by the CIA to the Gadhafi regime — then a nominal U.S. terror-war ally.

Belhaj was freed in 2010 by Gadhafi under an amnesty agreement for “former” terrorists. And more recently, the terror leader and his men were trained by U.S. special forces to take on Gadhafi. His leadership is now well established, and he continues to rule in Tripoli. More than likely, analysts say, he will end up being a key figure in the new regime.

A few reporters did highlight the seriousness of having a well-known terrorist in charge of the Libyan capital. Journalist Pepe Escobar, one of the first to report the news of Belhaj’s rise to power in Tripoli, explained in the *Asia Times*: “Every intelligence agency in the US, Europe and the Arab world knows where he’s coming from. He’s already made sure in Libya that himself and his militia will only settle for



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Sharia law.”

Escobar also noted that the repercussions would be widespread. “The story of how an al-Qaeda asset turned out to be the top Libyan military commander in still war-torn Tripoli is bound to shatter — once again — that wilderness of mirrors that is the ‘war on terror,’” he noted. It would also compromise “the carefully constructed propaganda of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) ‘humanitarian’ intervention in Libya.”

Abu Sufian Ibrahim bin Qumu: The former Guantanamo Bay inmate was considered by U.S. officials to be a “probable” member of al-Qaeda, according to government documents released by WikiLeaks. American investigators said bin Qumu represented a “medium-to-high risk.” Now, however, he is among the Libyan rebellion’s leadership.

The former-American-prisoner-turned-American-ally was captured in Pakistan after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. He was then sent to Guantanamo Bay, where U.S. analysts determined in 2005 that he was a “former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), [a] probable member of al Qaeda and a member of the North African Extremist Network.”

In addition to admittedly working for al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, bin Qumu “has a long-term association with Islamic extremist jihad and members of al-Qaeda and other extremist groups,” the document explained. While in Pakistan’s tribal region, bin Qumu “communicated with likely extremist element[s] in Afghanistan via radio ... , indicating a position of leadership.”

Citing intelligence obtained from the Libyan regime when it was still a U.S. terror-war ally, the secret report said bin Qumu was considered a “dangerous man with no qualms about committing terrorist acts.” He was known as one of the “extremist commanders of the Afghan Arabs,” the document stated, referring to jihadists in Afghanistan who were funded, armed, and trained by the U.S. government before apparently turning against it.

But even though American officials believed bin Qumu represented a “medium-to-high risk” and that “he is likely to pose a threat to the U.S., its interests and allies,” he was sent to Libya in 2007 following six years in Guantanamo. The next year, he was set free by Gadhafi under an “amnesty” program.

In 2011, bin Qumu — with U.S. and international military support — reportedly led an anti-Gadhafi rebel militia known as the “Darnah Brigade” from the Libyan city of the same name. “The former enemy and prisoner of the United States is now an ally of sorts, a remarkable turnabout resulting from shifting American policies rather than any obvious change in Mr. Qumu,” the *New York Times* noted in a piece about the jihadist.

Prior to being sent to Guantanamo, bin Qumu already had a long, documented history of problems with the law, too. According to the leaked U.S. report, he was sentenced to 10 years in a Libyan prison for “murder, physical assault, armed assault and distributing narcotics” after serving in Gadhafi’s military. He escaped from prison in 1993 and fled through Egypt to Afghanistan. There, he trained in at least two al-Qaeda terror camps, according to news reports.

The U.K. *Telegraph* reported that bin Qumu eventually moved to Sudan, where he went to work for a company owned by former al-Qaeda boss Osama bin Laden. Finally he returned to the Afghanistan-Pakistan region to help in the battle against U.S. forces before being captured by Pakistani police and shipped to Guantanamo.

Abdul Hakim al-Hasidi: The man identified by an article in the *Telegraph* and other reports as “the



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Libyan rebel leader” wasn’t always a friend of the West. In fact, he actually battled U.S. and coalition forces during the invasion of Afghanistan a decade ago. Al-Hasidi was captured in 2002, handed over to U.S. authorities, and eventually released in Libya in 2008. He promptly resumed his anti-American activities, admittedly recruiting dozens of jihadists to battle U.S. troops in Iraq with the LIFG.

In 2011, with U.S. and international air support, al-Hasidi was reportedly leading the anti-Gadhafi revolution. And in an interview with an Italian newspaper earlier this year, he admitted that the Islamic warriors he originally recruited to kill Western forces were fighting alongside Westerners in the war on Gadhafi.

The *Telegraph*, in an article entitled “Libyan rebel commander admits his fighters have al-Qaeda links,” quoted al-Hasidi as saying that his Iraq-war warriors “are patriots and good Muslims, not terrorists.” He also praised al-Qaeda, saying they are “good Muslims ... fighting against the invader.”

In a more recent interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, however, his tone was more moderate. “Our view is starting to change of the U.S.,” he said. “If we hated the Americans 100 percent, today it is less than 50 percent.”

Al-Qaeda Wins Big

Backed by NATO warplanes and armed with fancy Western weapons, Libyan militias boldly marched across the nation. Along the way they freed thousands of Islamic extremists Gadhafi had in prison, many of whom were affiliated with al-Qaeda. They also raided Gadhafi’s weapons stockpiles — including tens of thousands of missiles capable of bringing down airplanes — and began shipping them out of the country. By late October the al-Qaeda flag was flying over the Benghazi courthouse, a key revolutionary headquarters.

Al-Qaeda leaders outside of Libya cheered them on the whole way.

When regimes in the region refused to support the Libyan rebels with sufficient vigor, al-Qaeda attacked those governments, as well. After an attack on an important Algerian military academy that left 18 dead, for example, a statement released by al-Qaeda said the strike was due to the regime in Algeria “continuing to support the Libyan dictator Gadhafi to fight against our brothers.”

This pattern of siding with, arming, and training forces that hold great antipathy toward the United States is continual. As with Gadhafi, before becoming enemies of the U.S. government, many of the Libyan Islamists — especially those affiliated with the LIFG and al-Qaeda — were American allies. In fact, the U.S. government — by its own admission — actually armed, trained, and funded bin Laden and his Muslim warriors in Afghanistan just a few decades ago to battle the Soviet occupation. Many of those fighters eventually went back to Libya, where Gadhafi and the U.S. government became their next targets.

Of course, none of this apparent madness went unnoticed. But the establishment press did its best to downplay the significance of ex-U.S. foes in the Libyan rebellion, describing rebel leaders as “reformed” Islamic militants, “former” jihadists, etc. Today, after killing Gadhafi, they are taking charge.

New Regime: Old Regime

Of course, not *all* of the new Libyan rulers are veteran jihadists who have battled U.S. troops. More than a few prominent leaders are members of the only slightly more “moderate” Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. Leading the Tripoli Governing Council, for instance, is the Brotherhood’s Abel al-Rajazk Abu Hajar. Among the new regime’s most important political and spiritual leaders is senior Brotherhood



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boss Ali Sallabi.

Many of the new rulers are also old rulers — former Gadhafi officials, in fact. The Interim Transitional Council (NTC) chairman and de facto head of state Mustafa Abdul Jalil, for example, was a top functionary in the previous regime. By 2007, he had become the “Justice” Minister, a position he held until this year. When the revolution broke out, Gadhafi sent Jalil to Benghazi to negotiate the release of hostages seized by rebels. He defected and became the official “leader” of the rebellion, though many Islamist fighters still refuse to recognize his purported authority.

The other public face of the new NTC regime, so-called Interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, was also a former Gadhafi regime functionary. In 2007, Jibril was appointed to lead Libya’s National Economic Development Board. And like Jalil, he defected to the rebels early on.

But even with senior Gadhafi regime figures close to the top, Sharia will be the law of the land in “liberated” Libya — assuming the current regime manages to maintain control. “We take the Islamic religion as the core of our new government,” noted NTC Chairman Jalil during a celebration of Gadhafi’s killing. “The constitution will be based on our Islamic religion.” Any laws that conflict with Islam, such as Gadhafi’s ban on polygamy, are “null and void legally,” Jalil explained.

The new Libyan constitution, if an official draft released in late August is any indication of what may emerge, will also create a hybrid between big-government socialism and Islamic law. Article 8, for instance, makes the government responsible for providing “an appropriate standard of living” for all citizens. Article 1 notes that “Islam is the religion of the state and the principal source of legislation is Islamic jurisprudence.”

The first round of elections, according to NTC officials, should come within the next eight months. That vote would aim to create a committee to finalize a constitution and an official interim government. After the new constitution is approved, real elections would take place sometime in 2013 to elect a President and parliament. At least that is supposed to be the plan.

But following Egypt’s “revolution” to unseat despot Hosni Mubarak, the military junta that took over has repeatedly postponed elections. And instead of organizing a process for voting, the new regime has taken to mowing down Christian protesters in Cairo who were upset over repeated attacks on their churches. In Tunisia, Libya’s neighbor to the west, elections were held after despot Ben Ali fled the country. Those resulted in a landslide win for Islamism.

Uncivil War

Almost from the beginning of the civil war, the rebels have been accused of monstrous war crimes and wide-scale barbarity — some of it too horrendous even to mention. In the early weeks and months, gruesome videos surfaced online showing beheadings, lynchings, and other crimes perpetrated by rebel forces, proving that at least some of the allegations are true.

Soon the rebels’ rage focused on people with dark skin in what some analysts called genocide and “ethnic cleansing,” sparking condemnation worldwide from human-rights groups and officials. Reports and photographic evidence indicate that atrocities up to and including mass executions took place. And many black victims were found with their hands bound behind their backs and bullets through their skulls.

Horrific internment camps, systematic rape, rampant torture, lynching, and looting of businesses owned by blacks were all reported as well. Countless sub-Saharan Africans were forced to flee their homes in



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Libya to avoid the same fate. Black migrant workers probably suffered the most.

The campaign of racist terror began shortly after the Benghazi uprising in February, when rumors that Gadhafi hired black mercenaries began circulating. As insurgent forces solidified their grip over most of Libya, their race-based persecution quickly intensified. Entire cities and towns formerly occupied by blacks were ultimately ethnically cleansed and destroyed.

“The Brigade for Purging Slaves, Black Skin” — apparently a rebel slogan — was found months ago scrawled all along the road to Tawarga. By mid-September, the coastal city of about 10,000 mostly black residents had essentially been wiped off the map. Rebel forces rounded up the remaining inhabitants and reportedly shipped them to camps, although reporters searching for the former residents were not able to locate them. Homes, businesses, and schools were then looted before being burned to the ground.

Finally, graffiti reading “slaves,” “negroes,” and “abeed” — a derogatory term for blacks — was painted all over the ruins by NATO’s revolutionaries. The former city then became a “closed military area,” according to rebels guarding a checkpoint interviewed by the McClatchy news service. “Tawarga no longer exists,” a rebel commander told the *Wall Street Journal*. Another rebel fighter boasted: “We are setting it on fire to prevent anyone from living here again.”

In late August, the U.K.’s *Independent* reported that a makeshift hospital had become a ghastly crime scene. Dozens of men, almost all of them black, were murdered and left to rot — some of them still hooked up to medical equipment. “The killings were pitiless,” the paper observed. “Many of [the victims] had their hands tied behind their back, either with plastic handcuffs or ropes. One had a scarf stuffed into his mouth.”

Amnesty International’s Nicolas Beger condemned the wanton savagery in an interview with the Associated Press, saying sub-Saharan Africans “are at real risk of being taken from their work or their homes or the street to be tortured or killed.” A report released by the organization noted that Gadhafi’s regime had perpetrated widespread abuses. But rebel forces “have also committed human rights abuses, in some cases amounting to war crimes.”

Libya’s Future: More War?

Even as the NTC declared Libya “liberated” following the violent death of Gadhafi, analysts were warning that civil war might continue to rage on as loyalists, militia groups, and armed factions struggled to seize power. And it is already happening.

Western leaders demanded that all of the revolutionary groups unify behind the NTC. But widely divergent interests — including remaining pro-Gadhafi forces and victims of NATO bombings and rebel brutality — would seem to make that a difficult proposition, according to Libyans and outside analysts.

There are many critical and possibly irreconcilable fault lines dividing Libyan society — Islamists, liberals, tribal chiefs, ethnic groups, Gadhafi loyalists, desert nomads, regional factions, and more. Some of the competing groups and interests were able to unite around deposing the Libyan government. But now that it is officially ousted, the already-tense situation is becoming even more complex.

Various self-appointed councils, committees, militias, and brigades continue bickering, with some even producing arrest warrants for leaders of others. And many of the groups and chiefs have so far refused to recognize the NTC as the new legitimate regime. “With so many armed groups operating in Tripoli



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and elsewhere in Libya, a peaceful resolution to the question of who should take power is unlikely,” noted an analysis by Stratfor, a global intelligence firm. “The shape of the new Libya is highly uncertain, but what is clear is that the NTC is not going to simply take control where Gadhafi left off.”

More violence is likely. And tensions are so high that some experts have suggested that a second “civil war” is a distinct possibility as the power struggle between different armed coalitions continues to gain strength. “The unique common goal for all the NTC factions was to defeat Gadhafi and clear the ground for building a new Libyan authority. So in a way Gadhafi continued to keep the country united even during the conflict,” noted Gabriele Iacovino, a North Africa analyst at the Italy-based International Studies Centre. “Now Gadhafi is dead and who knows what will happen next.”

Divisions between the pro- and anti-Gadhafi camps remain strong, too. As rebel forces overtook Gadhafi strongholds, countless suspected supporters of the regime were arrested, tortured, and even executed without trial. But others escaped to fight another day. A week after Gadhafi was killed, Reuters reported that furious tribesmen were already waging an insurgency against the new regime.

Even with overwhelming assistance from the most powerful military alliance in the world, it took nearly eight months to officially bring down Gadhafi — indicating a strong level of resistance against the new regime or its foreign backers that will not be easy to quell. And Gadhafi reportedly distributed huge stockpiles of wealth and arms among loyalists nationwide before his demise in preparation for what his regime vowed would be a long-lasting and bloody insurgency.

Western leaders — praising the mission as a success and model to be followed in the future — have promised to continue showering the new Libyan regime with taxpayer money for as long as necessary. The NTC asked NATO to stay to fight off the growing insurgency. But the UN voted on October 27 to end international military operations, and NATO said it planned to withdraw by the end of the month.

By November, Libyan weapons were popping up all over the region — often in the hands of anti-Israel militants near Gaza. Much of Libya was in ruins. Bloated bodies were decomposing on the streets as fighting and gun battles continued to rage.

Critics and pessimists were warning that the real disasters were still to come, complaining that Libya was just the latest in an endless parade of tragic U.S. foreign policy fiascos that would blow up in America’s face. Western leaders, meanwhile, were tripping over themselves to celebrate the success.

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