



ISIS Gaining Strength in Libya

The Islamic State, popularly known as ISIS, has established a presence in the Libyan coastal city of Sirte, located about halfway between Tripoli and Benghazi. Many sources fear that ISIS will use this foothold to expand its influence throughout Libya. Best known for being the birthplace of the late former dictator Moammar Gadhafi, the city was the final major stronghold of Gadhafi loyalists in the Libyan Civil War. Gadhafi was killed there by a rebel force in 2011.



A report in *USA Today* on November 30 quoted statements from several sources considered to be authoritative expressing concern that the ISIS presence in Libya will strengthen.

“The worrisome thing is if ISIS central decides to pivot and pour more resources in, it could be worse,” *USA Today* quoted Frederic Wehrey, an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, as saying. Wehrey said the ISIS militants appear to be pressing south and east of Sirte to control oil facilities in the area.

The paper also quoted Patrick Johnston, a counterterrorism analyst at the RAND Corporation, who said: “Libya is probably right now the most significant threat to becoming a full-blown sanctuary” for ISIS.

The report noted that U.S. efforts to build a unified government in Libya — a mission that is far removed from any powers granted to our government by the Constitution — have declined since last year, when the United States suspended efforts to train a Libyan military force of 5,000 to 8,000 personnel. *USA Today* cited a Pentagon source for an explanation of why our military had ended the training mission, stating that it was because of an increase in fighting among competing factions in Libya and because the country lacked a broad-based government.

The report also quoted a curious statement from Daniel Serwer, a professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and a scholar at the Middle East Institute, who said: “Our level of commitment to Libya was always modest. We regarded Libya as a European responsibility.”

One would think that, with the colonial era in Africa having passed, that Libya would be neither an American nor a European, but an African, responsibility.

The situation in Libya in many ways resembles that of Iraq and Syria, where U.S. intervention toppled one strongman who served as a buffer against radical terrorism of the type engaged in by ISIS and al-Qaeda and has supported rebel factions attempting to overthrow another one.



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Libya has followed the same pattern. Gadhafi, while unquestionably an authoritarian despot, was considered an important U.S. ally in the war on terror as recently as 2009. The United States and Libya had cooperated in anti-terrorism efforts against groups such as the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which merged with al-Qaeda in 2007.

In 2009, a delegation of U.S. senators, including John McCain (R-Ariz.), Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.), Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), and others went to Tripoli and praised Gadhafi's regime and encouraged the strengthening of bilateral ties between the two governments.

"The Senators expressed appreciation for Libya's counterterrorism cooperation in the region," a leaked U.S. diplomatic message noted.

But Gadhafi eventually fell from grace with the U.S. government, and several theories have been offered to explain why. One explanation offered was that the UN passed a resolution purporting to authorize military intervention to prevent civilians deaths perpetrated by the regime, but this was an uneconomical way to save lives, since tens of thousands of civilians were killed during the ensuing civil war — many by NATO and anti-Gadhafi rebel forces — in what experts have called war crimes.

Another explanation offered was that Gadhafi's plan to stop selling Libyan oil in U.S. dollars and to demand payment in gold-backed dinars instead, was the real reason the United States turned against him. This theory was supported by a [report](#) in *The New American* on March 30, 2011, noting that the rebels who took over Libya from Gadhafi establish a new central bank to replace Gadhafi's state-owned monetary authority. The U.S. government and the UN both announced afterward that the rebels would be free to sell oil under their control and would not be subject to U.S. sanctions — if they do it without Gadhafi's National Oil Corporation.

As *The New American* noted in a [more recent article](#) last January, there was a much greater ISIS and al-Qaeda presence in Libya than was reported by *USA Today*. After noting that the Obama administration and NATO, acting under the claimed "authority" of a UN resolution, backed al-Qaeda-linked jihadist rebels and helped overthrow the Gadhafi regime, *TNA* noted that Libya "has now essentially become a terror state — with groups ranging from the Islamic State (ISIS) to al-Qaeda openly roaming the capital and operating training centers across large swaths of the nation under their control."

TNA continued:

Across Libya, there are myriad warring factions, tribal groups, terrorist organizations, self-declared "authorities," criminal gangs, and more competing for power.... [These include] jihadists under the "Libyan Dawn" umbrella, such as those supported by the Obama administration during the war on Gadhafi — al-Qaeda-related organizations, ISIS, the Muslim Brotherhood, their affiliates, and others. It currently controls the capital, Tripoli, as well as other major cities across Libya.

The developments in Libya were not a surprise to those who understand the folly of Western intervention into Middle Eastern affairs. As *The New American* noted in the article "Thirty Years of Projecting the Lines" back in 2011:

In 2011, the American political establishment celebrated "victory" when Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi was toppled with the help of the NATO air war, just as the establishment had celebrated "victory" in 2003 when Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein was toppled. But as was the case with Iraq, the celebration of Libya's liberation was premature.

This was predictable. As we observed in our November 21, 2011 cover story "Libya: Now What?":



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“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.... More violence is likely. And tensions are so high that some experts have suggested that a second ‘civil war’ is a distinct possibility.”

The devastating events that transpired in Iraq and Libya, and are still ongoing in Syria, have become so predictable that one can hardly dismiss them as mere incompetence. Anyone with simple powers of observation can readily see that our interventionist foreign policy has been deliberately wreaking havoc on nation after nation in the Islamic world. Certainly dictators are bad, and in an ideal world the people living under them would be better off having a system of government similar to our own. But such governments must be built from the ground up, not created in the chaotic aftermath of deposing a dictator when no suitable replacement government is readily available.

Former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) hit the nail on the head when he noted in a recent article: “The reason so many are fleeing places like Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq is that US and European interventionist foreign policy has left these countries destabilized with no hopes of economic recovery.... Even when they successfully change the regime, as in Iraq, what is left behind is an almost uninhabitable country.”

The best thing the United States could have done in Iraq and Libya, and can still do in Syria, is to leave the status quo in place and allow the people of each nation to fashion their own system of government, as our own founding fathers did back in the 18th century.

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