

How Al Qaeda men came to power in Libya

by Thierry Meyssan

Voltaire Network has received letters from many readers enquiring about Al-Qaeda in Libya. To respond to them, Thierry Meyssan has assembled the main data available on the issue. The facts confirm his analysis, defended since the events of September 11, that Al Qaeda is a hotbed of mercenaries used by the United States to fight in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Kosovo, Iraq, and now Libya, Syria and Yemen.

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Historical leader of Al Qaeda in Libya, Abdel Hakim Belhadj, is now the military governor of "liberated" Tripoli and in charge of organizing the army of the "new Libya".

In the 80s, the CIA instigated Awatha al-Zuwawi to create an agency in Libya to recruit mercenaries for the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. As from 1986, recruits were trained in the Salman al-Farisi Libyan camp in Pakistan, under the authority of anti-Communist billionaire Osama bin Laden.

When bin Laden moved to Sudan, the Libyan jihadists followed him there, and regrouped in a compound of their own. In 1994, Osama bin Laden dispatched Libyan jihadists back to their country to kill Muammar Gaddafi and reverse the Socialist People's Libyan

Arab Jamahiriya.

On 18 October 1995, the group reassembled under the label of Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). During the three years that followed, the LIFG attempted to assassinate Muammar Gaddafi on four occasions and to establish a guerrilla in the Southern mountainous region. Following these operations, the Libyan army – under the command of General Abdel Fattah Younes – waged a campaign to eradicate the guerrillas, and the Libyan judicial authorities issued an arrest warrant against Osama bin Laden, disseminated internationally through Interpol as from 1998.

According to UK counter espionage agent David Shayler, the development of the LIFG and the first assassination attempt on Gaddafi by Al-Qaeda was funded by the British MI6 to the tune of 100,000 pounds [1].

At the time, Libya was the only state in the world that was hunting for Osama bin Laden, who still officially enjoyed the political support of the United States, despite his disapproval of "Operation Desert Storm."

Under pressure from Tripoli, Hassan el-Turabi expelled the Libyan jihadists from Sudan. They transferred their infrastructure to Afghanistan, where they set up the Shaheed Shaykh Abu Yahya camp (just north of Kabul). The lay-out lasted until the summer of 2001, when the Berlin negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban on the Trans-Afghanistan pipeline fell through. At that time, Mullah Omar, who had anticipated the Anglo-American invasion, demanded that the camp be placed under his direct control.

On 6 October 2001, the LIFG was put on the list established by the Committee in pursuance of UN Security Council resolution 1267. It is still on it. On 8 December 2004, the LIFG was included on the list of terrorist organizations drawn up by the U.S. State Department. It is still on it. On 10 October 2005, the UK Department of the Interior banned the LIFG from its territory. This measure is still in force. On 7 February 2006, the United Nations adopted sanctions against five members of the LIFG and the four

companies linked to them, which continue to operate unfettered on UK territory under the MI6 protection.

During the "war against terrorism", the organization of the jihadist movement got underway. "*Al Qaeda*", which was initially a large database from which Osama bin Laden chose the mercenaries he needed for specific missions, gradually morphed into a cluster of cells, the size of which decreased the more it became structured.

On 6 March 2004, the new LIFG leader Abdel Hakim Belhadj, who had fought in Afghanistan alongside Osama bin Laden [2] and Iraq, was arrested in Malaysia and then transferred to a secret CIA prison in Thailand, where he was injected with truth serum and tortured. Following an agreement between the United States and Libya, he was returned to Libya where he was again tortured, but this time at the hands of British agents at the Abu Salim Prison.

On 26 June 2005, Western intelligence agencies held a meeting in London of Libyan dissidents. They constituted the "National Conference of the Libyan opposition", bringing together three Islamic factions: the Muslim Brothers, the Senoussi Brotherhood and the LIFG. Their manifesto set forth three objectives:

- to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi;
- to exercise power for one year (under the name "National Transition Council");
- to restore the constitutional monarchy to its 1951 form and make Islam the state religion.

In July 2005, Abu al-Laith al-Liby succeeded against all odds to escape from the maximum security prison in Bagram (Afghanistan) and became one of the leaders of al-Qaeda. He appealed to those LIFG jihadists who had not yet done so to rally Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Libyans soon constituted the majority among the Al-Qaeda suicide bombers in Iraq [3] In February 2007, al-Liby led a spectacular attack on the base at Bagram just as Vice President Dick Cheney's visit was about to take place. In November 2007, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu al-Laith al-Liby announced LIFG's merger with Al-Qaeda.

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Abu al-Lait al-Liby was appointed deputy to Ayman al-Zawahiri, and in this capacity became Al-Qaeda's No. 2 man, in the absence of news from Osama bin Laden. He was killed by a CIA drone in Waziristan in late January 2008.

During the period 2008–2010, Saif el-Islam Kadhafi negotiated a truce between the Libyan Jamahiriya and the LIFG. The latter published a lengthy document, *The Corrective Studies*, in which it acknowledged its error in having called for a jihad against fellow Muslims in a Muslim country. In three successive stages, all members of Al-Qaeda were pardoned and released on the sole condition that they renounce violence in writing. Of the 1800 jihadists, over one hundred rejected the agreement and preferred to remain in prison.

Upon his release, Abdel Hakim Belhadj left Libya and moved to Qatar.

In early 2011, Prince Bandar Bin Sultan made a series of trips with the aim of revitalizing Al-Qaeda by broadening recruitment, so far almost exclusively limited to Arabs and Muslims from Central and Southeast Asia. Recruitment offices were opened in Malaysia [4]. The best result was obtained in Mazar-i-Sharif, where more than 1,500 Afghans signed up for the jihad in Libya, Syria and Yemen [5]. Within weeks, Al-Qaeda evolved from a small dwindling group to a 10 000-man strong force. Such recruitment has been rendered even easier by the fact that jihadists are the cheapest mercenaries on the market.

On 17 February 2011, "National Libyan Opposition Conference" organized a "day of anger" in Benghazi, which sparked the beginning of the war.

On 23 February, Imam Abdelkarim al-Hasadi proclaimed the creation of an Islamic Emirate in Derna, the most fundamentalist city in Libya and home to the majority of jihadist who became suicide bombers in Iraq. Al-Hasadi is a long-standing member of the LIFG who was tortured by the United States at Guantanamo Bay [6]. The burqa was made mandatory and corporal punishment has been reinstated. Emir al-Hasidi has created his own army,

starting out with a few dozen jihadists who currently number more than one thousand.

Tasked with coordinating the Allied operation in Libya, AFRICOM commander Gen. Carter Ham voiced his misgivings about the presence, among the rebels he was being asked to defend, of Al-Qaeda jihadists responsible for killing GIs in Afghanistan and Iraq. He was relieved of his mission, which was taken over by NATO.

All across "liberated" Cyrenaica, Al-Qaeda men have been spreading terror, resorting to massacre and torture; they have specialized in slitting the throats of Gaddafi sympathizers, eye-plucking and cutting off the breasts of immodest women. The lawyer for the Libyan Jamahiriya, Marcel Ceccaldi, has accused NATO of "complicity in war crimes."

On 1 May 2011, Barack Obama announced that, in Abbottabad (Pakistan), the US Navy's SEAL Team Six had taken out Osama bin Laden, about whom no reliable news had been heard for almost 10 years. The announcement padlocked the Al-Qaeda file and enabled the revamping of the jihadists into the renewed allies of the United States as in the good old days of the Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and Kosovo wars [7] On 6 August, all the members of SEAL commando 6 perished in the crash of their helicopter.

Abdel Hakim Belhadj returned to his country in a Qatar military plane at the onset of the NATO intervention. He took command of the Al-Qaeda men in the Jebel Nefoussa mountains. According to the son of General Abdel Fattah Younes, it was Belhadj who sponsored the murder on 28 July 2011 of his old enemy, who had meanwhile become the military leader of the National Transition Council. After the fall of Tripoli, Abdel Hakim Belhadj opened the gates of the Abu Salim prison, liberating all the Al-Qaeda jihadists who were still detained. He was appointed military governor of Tripoli. He currently demands an apology from the CIA and MI6 for the treatment inflicted on him in the past [8]. The National Transitional Council has put him in charge of training the army of the new Libya.

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[1] "David Shayler: 'I quit the British secret service when the MI6 decided to fund Osama bin Laden's partners'", *Voltaire Network*, 24 November 2005.

[2] "Libya's Powerful Islamist Leader", by Babak Dehghanpisheh, *The Daily Beast*, 2 September 2011.

[3] "Once NATO enemies in Iraq and Afghanistan, now NATO allies in Libya ", by Webster G. Tarpley, *Voltaire Network*, 24 May 2011.

[4] "The Middle East counter-revolution ", by Thierry Meyssan, *Voltaire Network*, 26 May 2011.

[5] "CIA recruits 1,500 from Mazar-e-Sharif to fight in Libya", by Azhar Masood, *The Nation*, 31 August 2011

[6] "Noi ribelli, islamici e tolleranti", a report by Roberto Bongiorno, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 22 March 2011.

[7] "Reflections on the official announcement of the death of Osama Bin Laden", by Thierry Meyssan, *Voltaire Network*, 8 May 2011.

[8] "Libyan commander demands apology over MI6 and CIA plot", by Martin Chulov, Nick Hopkins and Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Guardian*, 4 September 2011.

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