Post Gaddafi Libya Splits Up into Five Regional Factions

Military Map

By Chris Tomson
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Since the fall of Mu'ammar Gaddafi in late 2011, various militias with very different political agendas have attempted to seize power in Libya.

Elections were held in the country in both 2012 and 2014; however, election turnout dropped from 60% to 18% largely due to the Islamist parties and Gaddafi loyalists boycutting the 2014 election.

Effectively, a coalition of nationalists known as 'Majlis al-Nuwaab' (i.e Council of Deputies) gained power after years instability.

However, the Islamist umbrella organization "New General National Congress" (predominantly constituted by the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood branch), ousted the newly elected government from Tripoli and from then on, Libyans could once again witness their homeland in all-out war.

Meanwhile, Ansar al-Sharia (al-Qaeda's branch in Libya) emerged in 3 key cities, Benghazi, Ajdabiyah and Derna while the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS) managed to spawn fighters seemingly out of nowhere, thereby seizing control of both Sirte and Sabratha.

Mapping up modern day Libya leaves the country split in 5 regions:

Red: Current Libyan government – Council of Deputies

Recognized by most countries as the legitimate government of Libya; this faction controls the remnants of the Libyan National Army along with militias loyal to the Council of Deputies bloc.

Unfortunately, they only control the eastern part of Libya and find themselves in a bitter struggle with Islamists from Ansar al-Shariah and the New General National Congress respectively.

If they are to regain control of Libya, they must first rout Ansar al-Shariah from Benghazi, Ajdabiyah and Derna.

Once these cities are secured, they must push west towards the capital of Tripoli;

nevertheless, they currently maintain control of more than 50 % of the country.

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Green: New General National Congress – Libya Dawn

The New General National Congress (NGNC) is quite possibly the most popular party in Libya; however, they lack international support for their newly-formed government in Tripoli after the latter was seized in a Coup D'état in 2014.

Their militia fighters are commonly known as 'Libya Dawn'.

The strongest voice in the NGNC bloc is the Muslim Brotherhood, which for decades was deemed illegal and heavily repressed by the former Libyan regime.

For the New General National Congress to win the war, they must choose their allies and battles wisely whilst also achieving backing from at least some friendly foreign countries.

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Yellow: Ansar al-Shariah – Shura Council of Libya

The Libyan al-Qaeda affiliate, Ansar al-Shariah, made itself internationally known with the 2012 Benghazi attack which killed U.S. Ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, and U.S. Foreign Service Information Management Officer, Sean Smith; this Salafist group has been active since the Libyan rebellion against Gaddafi in early 2011.

Despite a strong underground presence, Ansar al-Shariah controls merely 3 seperate enclaves in eastern Libya, most notably in Benghazi itself.

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Purple: Toureg militia tribesmen

Much of the newly reopened border with Algeria is controlled by the ethnically diverse Tuareg tribal militias.

These indigenous Berber people are genetically unrelated to the Arab Libyans in the north.

For years, Tuareg tribesmen clashed with the Libyan Army under Gaddafi which effectively caused them to form an army of their own in retaliation.

The forces unified under the Toureg banner are largely autonomous but maintain close ties to the Tripoli-based New General National Congress while hostility continues between Toureg tribesmen and the Tobruk-Benghazi based Council of Deputies.

These tribesmen do not intend to capture all of Libya but merely to protect the Tuareg lands.

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Black: Islamic State

The new phenomenon in northeast Africa and southwest Asia is the rise of the so-called "Islamic State."

The fighters loyal to the IS caliphate first emerged in Libya in November, 2014.

Despite reports to the contrary, these ISIS fighters are believed to have emerged from Islamist NGNC deserters who aligned themselves with a more hardcore interpretation of Islam.

This explains how ISIS was able to seize control of both the port city of Sirte and the ancient Roman city of Sabratah – both were formerly controlled by the Islamist New General National Congress.

Strategically, long-term ISIS plans look to incorporate the whole of Libya under one Pan-Islamic caliphate which would be in line with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's 5-year plan of conquering both the Middle East and Africa.

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