

## NATO's 'humanitarian' Bloodbath in Libya

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### **“We had to destroy the village in order to save it.”**

NATO's war in Libya, which began with high-minded declarations about “protecting civilians,” now appears likely to end in a bloodbath that will claim the lives of many civilians, albeit pro-Gaddafi civilians, not the earlier threatened anti-Gaddafi civilians.

Ali Tarhouni, a senior official of the NATO-backed Libyan rebels, summed up this Orwellian reality with a phrase reminiscent of the famous Vietnam War quote that “we had to destroy the village in order to save it.”

Tarhouni was quoted by the Associated Press as saying “Sometimes to avoid bloodshed you must shed blood - and the faster we do this the less blood will be shed.”

So, NATO's rebels set a four-day deadline for Muammar Gaddafi's remaining tribal strongholds, including his native Sirte, to surrender or face a final crushing military strike, which the rebels presumably will mount as NATO aircraft pound Sirte's defenses.

NATO spokesman Col. Roland Lavoie explained that NATO still considered Gaddafi as a threat and thus NATO's warplanes were still attacking his forces, especially on “a corridor to the eastern edge of Sirte.”

In other words, even though Gaddafi's loyalists have retreated to a few towns where he appears to retain strong popular support, NATO is paving the way for the rebels to overrun these communities. The mission “to protect civilians” has evolved into an operation designed to open pro-Gaddafi civilians to a hostile conquest.

New evidence also has surfaced showing that Gaddafi's earlier claims that the rebel forces were permeated by Islamist extremists with terrorist affiliations were not just words, that he had reason and evidence to believe it.

The Washington Post [reported](#) Wednesday that “documents unearthed from the archives of Libya's security service show the former government deeply worried about an Islamist threat to the regime, concerns that reverberated this week as veteran jihadists claimed credit for leading last week's rebel takeover of Tripoli.”

In an article by Thomas Erdbrink and Joby Warrick, the Post said it had obtained documents revealing that Gaddafi had assigned his Interior Security Agency to monitor the actions of Islamic extremists, including some who had fought against the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“In the records, Libyan security officials elaborately map the movements of suspected al-Qaeda fighters and regularly share information on Islamist cells with foreign intelligence agencies,” the Post reported, noting that some of these jihadists have now emerged as key fighters in ousting Gaddafi from power.

“The regime fell to rebel fighters led in part by a self-proclaimed former Islamist, Abdelkarim Belhadj,” the Post wrote. “He has declared himself the leader of the ‘Tripoli Brigade’ that spearheaded the defeat of Gaddafi loyalists in the capital.”

Belhadj was previously the commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which has been associated with al-Qaeda in the past, maintained training bases in Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks, and was listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

Though Belhadj and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group deny current allegiance to al-Qaeda, Belhadj was arrested in Afghanistan in 2004 and was briefly interrogated by the CIA in Thailand at a “black site” prison before being handed over to Libyan authorities, the Post reported.

## Jihadist Warnings

Concerns about violent jihadists in the ranks of NATO’s Libyan rebels are not entirely new. In March, as NATO was ramping up its aerial campaign against Gaddafi’s government, there were [warnings](#) - both from Gaddafi and from independent terrorism experts - about this infiltration. However, amid the excitement about overthrowing Gaddafi, those concerns were suppressed.

For all his eccentric behavior and past links to terrorism, Gaddafi had become a staunch enemy of radical Islamists, explaining why his regime was embraced by President George W. Bush last decade. Both leaders had mutual enemies.

Similarly, Syria’s embattled dictator Bashar al-Assad has been another bulwark against Islamic extremism inside his country’s borders, in part, because Islamic fundamentalists despise Assad’s Alawite religion, considering it a form of apostasy that must be stamped out.

As analysts Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman wrote in a report for West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center, “the Syrian and Libyan governments share the United States’ concerns about violent salafi-jihadi ideology and the violence perpetrated by its adherents.”

In their [report](#) titled “Al-Qaeda’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq,” Felter and Fishman analyzed al-Qaeda documents captured in 2007 showing personnel records of militants who flocked to Iraq for the war. The documents revealed that eastern Libya (the base of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion) was a hotbed for suicide bombers traveling to Iraq to kill American troops.

Felter and Fishman wrote that these so-called Sinjar Records disclosed that while Saudis comprised the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq, Libyans represented the largest per-capita contingent by far. Those Libyans came overwhelmingly from towns and cities in the east.

“The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country’s Northeast, particularly the coastal cities of Darnah 60.2% (53) and Benghazi 23.9% (21),” Felter and Fishman wrote, adding:

“Both Darnah and Benghazi have long been associated with Islamic militancy in Libya, in particular for an uprising by Islamist organizations in the mid-1990s. ... One group — the Libyan Fighting Group ... — claimed to have Afghan veterans in its ranks,” a reference to mujahedeen who took part in the CIA-backed anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s, as did al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, a Saudi.

“The Libyan uprisings [in the 1990s] became extraordinarily violent,” Felter and Fishman wrote.

“Qadhafi used helicopter gunships in Benghazi, cut telephone, electricity, and water supplies to Darnah and famously claimed that the militants ‘deserve to die without trial, like dogs,’”

The authors added that Abu Layth al-Libi, Emir of Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), “reinforced Benghazi and Darnah’s importance to Libyan jihadis in his announcement that LIFG had joined al-Qa’ida.

“It is with the grace of God that we were hoisting the banner of jihad against this apostate [Gaddafi] regime under the leadership of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which sacrificed the elite of its sons and commanders in combating this regime whose blood was spilled on the mountains of Darnah, the streets of Benghazi, the outskirts of Tripoli, the desert of Sabha, and the sands of the beach.”

Libyans with al-Qaeda

Some important al-Qaeda leaders operating in Pakistan’s tribal regions also are believed to have come from Libya. For instance, [“Atiyah,”](#) who was guiding the anti-U.S. war strategy in Iraq (and was recently reported killed by a U.S. drone strike), was identified as a Libyan named Atiyah Abd al-Rahman.

It was Atiyah who urged a strategy of creating a quagmire for U.S. forces in Iraq, buying time for al-Qaeda headquarters to rebuild its strength in Pakistan. “Prolonging the war [in Iraq] is in our interest,” Atiyah said in a letter that upbraided Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for his hasty and reckless actions in Iraq.

As in the anti-Islamist crackdown of the 1990s, Gaddafi used harsh rhetoric in vowing to crush the Benghazi-based rebellion when it began earlier this year. Those threats were cited by President Barack Obama and other Western leaders as a key reason for securing a United Nations resolution and establishing a no-fly zone over Libya “to protect civilians” in eastern Libya.

In a personal letter to Obama, Gaddafi cited the role of terrorists in this new uprising.

“We are confronting al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, nothing more,” Gaddafi wrote. “What would you do if you found them controlling American cities with the power of weapons? Tell me how would you behave so that I could follow your example?” (Obama did not respond.)

Today, however, the tables have been turned on Gaddafi. After months of U.S.-guided NATO airstrikes incinerating his troops and battering his defenses in Tripoli, he has been driven from power by the rebels. His remaining loyalists have fled to Sirte and a few other Gaddafi strongholds.

If these loyalists don’t surrender to the rebels, Belhadj and other jihadis are likely to spearhead the final assaults – again backed by NATO airstrikes. The troops and civilians still loyal to Gaddafi don’t expect much mercy.

Or, in the words of rebel leader Tarhouni, “sometimes to avoid bloodshed you must shed blood.”

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