

DEFINING TERRORISM: THE HISTORY OF THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING  
GROUP AND THEIR IMAGE IN THE WEST

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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Central Michigan University  
Mount Pleasant, Michigan  
October, 2014

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For Kiri, without your support this would never have been possible.  
For my father, your journey is an inspiration that will never leave me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee: Dr. John Robertson, Dr. H. Talat Halman, and Dr. Stephen Scherer. Their guidance and support are greatly appreciated. I will be forever grateful for the time and attention these faculty members have given to me as a student.

## ABSTRACT

### DEFINING TERRORISM: THE HISTORY OF THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP AND THEIR IMAGE IN THE WEST

by Hytham Dali

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) has worked since its inception to dismantle the oppressive regime of Muammar Gaddafi in order to return to an orthodox vision of Islam in Libya. Unfortunately, violence has often surfaced as the most conventional means to achieve that goal. From a Western perspective, prior to the 2011 Libyan Revolution, the LIFG was a terrorist organization. The LIFG promoted an Islamist agenda, utilized violence to reach their goals, and were an opponent to Western allies following the Gaddafi-Bush alliance that formed after the events of September 11, 2001. However, this image quickly changed following the 2011 uprisings in Libya. Members of the LIFG became freedom fighters leading fellow revolutionaries into war and collaborating with NATO forces to eliminate Gaddafi's regime.

However, from 1995 to 2011, no changes were made to the LIFG's goals and the actions they used to accomplish those goals. The purpose of this study is to provide an accurate history of the LIFG, and to argue that the LIFG's designation as a terrorist organization is a product of inaccurate information and misunderstood ideals. This study is part of the greater process of mending relations between the West and the Islamic world, and repairing the damages Orientalism has had on the history of the Islamic world.

No large body of work has ever been written on the LIFG, and the argument for their delisting from the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list has never been made. In the process of this argument, this thesis will discuss the history of the LIFG; their

alleged affiliation with al-Qaeda; their listing as an FTO; issues in defining Islam, Islamism, Islamic radicalism, and terrorism; the LIFG's transition to the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change (LIMC); and the future of Libya.

Research was conducted through extensive analysis of primary sources found online through the Jamestown Foundation and the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point's United States Military Academy. Through proper examination of these issues, it can be determined that the LIFG's designation as an FTO is unwarranted. Furthermore, the evidence discussed in this thesis promotes a new approach to the process in which Islamist organizations are dealt with and how alleged terrorist organizations should be defined. Additionally, this thesis provides a guideline for future research regarding Islamist organizations and their designations as FTO's as well as their roles in local governance.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTC	Combating Terrorism Center
DoD	Department of Defense
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GICM	Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group
GNC	General National Congress
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
LIMC	Libyan Islamic Movement for Change
MEK	Mujahedin Khalq
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NTC	National Transition Council
RN	Revolutionary Nuclei
TMC	Tripoli Military Council

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Thesis

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's (LIFG) designation as a terrorist organization is not the result of a planned and calculated analysis of the group and its motivations but a knee-jerk reaction in the post-9/11 world. Careful analysis of the organization will conclude that their designation as a terrorist organization is unwarranted. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a proper analysis of the LIFG's history, goals, and motivations. The outcome of this analysis will find that the LIFG is not a terrorist organization, nor has it ever been a threat to the United States. Additionally, this thesis sets out to provide a stepping-stone into the world of Islamism. If the amount of care and detail given to the LIFG in this thesis is applied to similar Islamist organizations, similar results might be found.

In order to address these issues, some details must first be established. A history of the organization will provide the reader a base upon which further theories can be built and act as a reference point to arguments made in future sections. Discussing the LIFG alongside al-Qaeda will help to dispel myths surrounding the LIFG's relationship with the infamous terrorist organization and provide context as to how the LIFG became listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). An analysis of the United States' FTO list, including an examination of the issues surrounding the list and the future of U.S. involvement in the Islamic world will help argue for the LIFG's case to be delisted. The focus of this thesis will then switch to understanding Islam, Islamism, Islamic

Radicalism, and Terrorism. Defining these terms and applying this information to the arguments building in earlier sections will help solidify an understanding of the LIFG and Islamist groups as a whole. Finally, using all of the previous information gathered, an informed assessment regarding the future of the LIFG and Libya can be made.

### Importance

The events surrounding the Arab Spring have created a renewed interest in North Africa as Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt struggle to find stability post-revolution. Tunisia has become the poster-child of the Arab Spring, advocating peaceful protest and democratic rule. Egypt followed suit but has since garnered a great deal of interest surrounding the ousting of elected-President Mohamed Morsi. Libya's attempt for peaceful protest lasted only thirteen days before the de facto ruler of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, began to violently crack down on protesters. Unlike Tunisia's and Egypt's somewhat peaceful resolve, Libya was forced into a civil war. The aftermath of this conflict resulted in armed militias spread across Libya refusing to lay down arms. Despite their differences, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt share a common interest with the Western world: Islamists.

The West views Islamist groups as a threat to democracy and stability in North Africa. However, this connection is grounded in fear of the unknown. Islam and its adherents are, in effect, the twenty-first century's boogiemer. Years of polemical writing and misinformation have created a twisted perception of the Islamic world, grounded in fear and hate. The impact this perception has had on foreign relations with the Islamic world is crippling. To accuse an individual or an organization as terrorist or anti-western

requires no more than a connection to Islam and the means to cause harm. As a result, countless individuals and organizations have fallen under designation as terrorists.

The Information Age has given the Western world the tools and resources necessary to conduct research on an unlimited number of topics. Now is the time to repair the damage that years of misinformation had wrought on the relationship between the West and the Islamic world. Through proper research and education, groups like the LIFG can be given a place in a world that once marginalized them. It is the hope of the author that this thesis can be a part of achieving the greater goal of repairing relations between the West and the Islamic world and to contribute alongside countless authors to an accurate history of the Islamic world.

### Literature Review

Founded in 1990, the LIFG is a relatively new organization. Additionally, the actions of Gaddafi's police state in Libya have made it difficult for information to reach the rest of the world. Therefore, sources solely discussing the LIFG are few, and no large body of work has ever been written on the organization. The most prominent works regarding the LIFG are by Gary Gambill, a political analyst for Freedom House and former editor of Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, and Alison Pargeter, an analyst and writer specializing in North Africa and the Middle East who has held academic positions at the University of Cambridge and Kings College, London. Gambill's writings offer an in-depth analysis of the LIFG's past, and include a number of interviews with prominent ex-LIFG member Noman Benotman. Pargeter's writings focus more on the LIFG's designation as a terrorist organization and its role in North African and Global terrorism.

While Gambill and Pargeter provide the majority of the information available regarding the LIFG, a small number of larger publications mention the organization in passing. Notable examples are Omar Rashour's *Libyan Islamists Unpacked*; Christopher S. Chivvis' *Toppling Qaddafi*; and Jason Pack's monumental work, *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future* featuring contributors such as Benotman and James Brandon, associate fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence at King's College, London.

Supplementing these works are Lawrence Davidson's *Islamic Fundamentalism*, and Veronica Ward and Richard Sherlock's *Religion and Terrorism*. Both works offer a great deal of information regarding Islam in relation to terrorism. These sources are just a few of the many sources consulted during the research stages of this thesis. However, it is important to note that most of the research published thus far regarding the LIFG has been done by Gambill and Pargeter. Therefore, a large number of resources consulted for this thesis either base their information on Gambill's and Pargeter's works, or offer nothing new to the discussion. These sources will nonetheless be listed as consulted works in the bibliography.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORY OF THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP (LIFG)

#### Setting the Stage for Rebellion

By the early 1990s public resentment for Gaddafi was widespread across Libya. Educated Libyans understood the impact that Gaddafi's mismanagement of the declining oil prices in the 1980s was having on the country, as well as the influence that undertones of corruption were having throughout the regime.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, even non-educated Libyans understood that Gaddafi threatened the wellbeing of Libya. Gaddafi's Islam was not the same Islam Libyans lived by. Gaddafi severed ties with ulama<sup>2</sup> guidance shortly after stabilizing his position, nationalized religious endowments, and seized mosques across Libya.<sup>3</sup> These actions were all part of Gaddafi's initiative to return Islam back to more conservative roots, thus the implementation of Sharia.<sup>4</sup> However, it quickly became evident that Gaddafi's conservative Islamic views were highly un-orthodox. Gaddafi believed that the Qur'an was the only source for Islamic law and he believed the hadiths<sup>5</sup> and subsequently the Sunnah<sup>6</sup> had no role in Islamic governance. This disrespect for the hadiths and the Sunnah angered many Libyan Muslims. Additionally, while Gaddafi claimed his vision of Islam was a return to conservative roots he limited the usage of Sharia. Gaddafi argued in a number of major

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)," *Terrorism Monitor* 3 (2005), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=308#.VDQfI\\_idXTp](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=308#.VDQfI_idXTp).

<sup>2</sup> Ulama refers to an educated group of Muslim scholars who specialize in Islamic law.

<sup>3</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>4</sup> Sharia is traditionally understood as a set of religious laws which uses the Qur'an and the Sunnah as its sources for legal policies.

<sup>5</sup> Hadiths are traditionally understood as narratives or reports of the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>6</sup> The Sunnah is traditionally understood as the practices and beliefs of the Prophet Muhammad and in some interpretations his attitude and character.

speeches throughout the 1970s that Islamic law had no legal standing in modern societies.<sup>7</sup> This treatment of Islam was seen as a radical perversion of the orthodox vision of Islam held by many Libyans. Gaddafi's oppression instilled in many Libyans the notion that secularism threatened the Islamic way of life. This threat became a fuller reality during the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

Muslim Libyans, like many other Muslims across the Islamic world, joined forces with the Afghan Mujahideen to combat the Soviet Union. Their bond and resolution to defend the borders of Afghanistan were not based in nationalist fervor, or even Arab identity, but in the defense of Islam. The Soviet Union threatened the Islamic world and Muslims across the Islamic world answered the call to defend. This instilled in many Libyans a renewed sense of jihad and, more importantly, the means to conduct it through violence. The Afghan Mujahideen excelled in guerilla tactics and passed these skills on to Libyan soldiers over the course of the conflict. Returning Libyan soldiers were now trained and familiar with an array of weapons and tactics necessary to wage their own covert war back home.<sup>9</sup>

### The Formation of the LIFG

The LIFG (or in Arabic al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya) was founded in 1990 by Libyans returning from the war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. According to Noman Benotman, ex-LIFG leader, at its peak the LIFG had 1,000 members.<sup>10</sup> Rather than siding with organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, whose

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<sup>7</sup> Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122-23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ian Black, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – from al-Qaida to the Arab Spring," *The Guardian*, September 8, 2011.

teachings were popular amongst the ulama in Libya and Egypt, returning Libyan soldiers decided to create their own organization. The LIFG had no plans of restoring power to the ulama; their sole desire was to topple Gaddafi's regime and create an Islamic state envisioned by the people of Libya.<sup>11</sup> However, the details of this new democratic Libya are never explicitly described by members of the LIFG. The only constant message found in interviews and declarations by LIFG members and leaders is the abstract vision of a democratic Libya, ruled by the people. Additionally, like many Libyans, members of the LIFG did not agree with Gaddafi's perverted vision of Islam and the lack of religious freedom under his reign. While returning Libyan soldiers had the combat skills and determination necessary to wage war with Gaddafi's regime, they lacked armaments and manpower. Therefore, the LIFG chose to operate out of Sudan, with the help of the growing radical Islamic group, al-Qaeda.<sup>12</sup>

Despite al-Qaeda's assistance in arming and housing the LIFG, the LIFG's requests to begin operations and attacks against Gaddafi in Libya were denied by Hassan al-Turabi. Turabi, leader of the National Islamic Front, warned LIFG members against an armed rebellion in Libya.<sup>13</sup> In the early 1990s, nearly one million Sudanese worked in Libya which resulted in an unspoken agreement between Gaddafi and Turabi that allowed the transportation of Algerian militants in Sudan across the Libyan desert into Algeria.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, an armed rebellion in Libya would not only threaten the livelihood of the nearly one million Sudanese workers, but would also cripple Turabi's relations with Gaddafi.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lindsey Hilsum, *Sandstorm: Libya in the Time of Revolution* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 92.

<sup>13</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

However, Turabi's restrictions on the LIFG were lifted following the attempted assassination and coup against Gaddafi in October 1993.<sup>15</sup> Tying the October 1993 assassination attempt to the LIFG, however, is not reasonable given the infancy of the group. Additionally, the LIFG's base of operations was in Sudan, and its direct orders were to remain out of such a conflict in fear of reprisal from Sudan.<sup>16</sup> Once given permission from Turabi, the LIFG did begin to mobilize within Libya. However, initial efforts in Libya were lackluster, and many LIFG members were captured and imprisoned by Gaddafi's security forces.<sup>17</sup>

The LIFG's first major operation occurred in 1995. In their first operation, LIFG militants, disguised as members of Gaddafi's Revolutionary Committee, freed a detained LIFG member from a hospital, then weeks later they freed more members from a prison in Benghazi.<sup>18</sup> Gaddafi reacted in the same way he often reacted to domestic challenge: suppression. A massive sweep of arrests was made detaining individuals suspected of involvement with either operation, or affiliated with the LIFG.<sup>19</sup> To prevent rumors of usurpers mobilizing within Libya, these arrests were made under the guise of drug trafficking.<sup>20</sup>

Following the sweep of arrests, Gaddafi learned that Libya's domestic challengers were being funded by al-Qaeda in Sudan. In response to this news, Gaddafi ordered that all Libyan operatives within Sudan be expelled. In order to pressure Turabi into expelling the Libyan operatives, Gaddafi began deporting thousands of Sudanese

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Alison Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 168-9.

<sup>19</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

workers from Libya.<sup>21</sup> Osama bin Laden, likely pressured by Turabi, informed the Libyan operatives that they must leave Sudan. Each Libyan operative was then soon given \$2,400 and plane tickets for themselves and their families to leave Sudan.<sup>22</sup>

### Public Announcement and Assassination Attempts

After the events in Sudan, the LIFG came out in full force. They attacked Gaddafi security forces in Benghazi for weeks in September 1995.<sup>23</sup> Following these attacks, in October 1995, the LIFG announced existence of their organization to the public and denounced Gaddafi's regime as "an apostate regime that has blasphemed against the faith of God Almighty."<sup>24</sup> Prior to 1995, the LIFG was not an "official" organization in the sense that they had not yet revealed themselves publicly.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, prior to their departure from Sudan, Libyan operatives relied heavily on bin Laden's networks for financial support.

However, financial support from outside agents would continue to fund the LIFG's mission to remove Gaddafi from power. David Shayler, ex-MI5 officer, reported in 1998 that MI6 paid a sum of £100,000 (\$160,000 USD) to the LIFG to orchestrate the assassination of Gaddafi in 1996.<sup>26</sup> However, sources reporting this incident have conflicting dates. Two articles published by the BBC in August 1998, place the assassination attempt in February 1996.<sup>27</sup> Both articles describe an assassination

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Al-Hayat* (London), October 20, 1995. Cited in Gary Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)," *Terrorism Monitor* 3 (2005), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=308#.VDQfl\\_IdXTp](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=308#.VDQfl_IdXTp).

<sup>25</sup> Hilsum, *Sandstorm*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> "BBC Screens Shayler Interview," August 8, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/147474.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/147474.stm).

<sup>27</sup> "UK MI6 Plot to Kill Gaddafi Denied," August 6, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/146436.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/146436.stm);

"BBC Screens Shayler Interview," August 8, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/147474.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/147474.stm).

attempt in Sirte, in which a bomb was placed under Gaddafi's motorcade. The assassination attempt failed, however, as the LIFG placed the bomb under the wrong motorcade vehicle. The ensuing blast resulted in the deaths of Gaddafi's security officers and innocent civilians.<sup>28</sup> However, an article written by Martin Bright and published by *The Guardian* in November 2002 dates the assassination attempt to March 1996, rather than February 1996.<sup>29</sup> This is likely an error in dating rather than news of a separate assassination attempt.

The LIFG made another assassination attempt on Gaddafi in Brak, Libya, in November 1996.<sup>30</sup> This assassin threw a grenade at Gaddafi as he made his way through a crowd of admirers. However, the grenade failed to detonate and Gaddafi escaped the incident unharmed, though shocked.<sup>31</sup> In 1998, video footage of the failed assassination aired on Libyan TV, not only showing the assassin's face, but zooming in multiple times to show the culprit in the act. What is interesting about this broadcast, according to Bright, is that the assassin is described by Gaddafi's regime as a British agent.<sup>32</sup> It is clear in the video footage that the assassin is a young Arab male, whether or not the assassin is British cannot be determined from the video footage, but it seems unlikely that the culprit was working for Britain. It is doubtful that Britain funded this attack, as MI6 allegedly did in March 1996. The attack was terribly simple, uncoordinated, and unsuccessful. Had British money been involved in the November assassination attempt, it would have likely resembled the March 1996 attempt which

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Bright, "MI6 'Halted Bid to Arrest bin Laden'," *The Guardian*, November 9, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/nov/10/uk.davidshayler>.

<sup>30</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bright, "MI6 'Halted Bid to Arrest bin Laden'."

involved multiple explosives in a coordinated attack. Additionally, the LIFG claimed responsibility for the November attack on January 2, 1997, and even gave the name of the assassin: Mohammed Abdallah al-Ghrew.<sup>33</sup> Despite these discrepancies, it is likely that Gaddafi's regime wished to link the LIFG with Britain in order to suppress the notion of domestic rebellion. Regardless of which assassination attempt the money was allocated to, according to David Shayler, British money was being provided to the LIFG in order to assassinate Gaddafi.<sup>34</sup>

The validity of Shayler's testimony has yet to be confirmed. In fact, some may question the validity of his statements in light of his recent claims of divinity and conspiracy notions regarding the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which have smeared his image.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, Noman Benotman, former LIFG leader, said in an interview with Mahan Abedin that rumors of Britain funding the 1996 assassination attempt are purely disinformation.<sup>36</sup> Benotman went on to say, "There may have been such a plan but it certainly did not involve the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Libya: News and Views," <http://www.libyanet.com/1-97nwsc.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> "BBC Screens Shayler Interview."

<sup>35</sup> Jane Fryer, "The MI5 Messiah: Why David Shayler Believes He's the Son of God," August 15, 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-475616/The-MI5-Messiah-Why-David-Shayler-believes-hes-son-God.html> and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/what-renegade-mi5-officer-david-shayler-did-next-1763246.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Mahan Abedin, Interview with Noman Benotman, "From Mujahid to Activist: An Interview with a Libyan Veteran of the Afghan Jihad," *Spotlight on Terror* 3 (2005), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx\\_ttnews%5Bany\\_of\\_the\\_words%5D=benotman&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=27728&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=7ddcfa3e774b1a5b4715308c09b12ead#.VDQhB\\_IdXTp](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bsword%5D=8fd5893941d69d0be3f378576261ae3e&tx_ttnews%5Bany_of_the_words%5D=benotman&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=27728&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=7ddcfa3e774b1a5b4715308c09b12ead#.VDQhB_IdXTp).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

## The Final Blow and Dormancy of the LIFG

By March 1996, the LIFG was in full force. Following the escape of Islamist prisoners from al-Kuwaifiya prison in March 1996, the LIFG began a brutal engagement with Gaddafi security forces.<sup>38</sup> These encounters began with the LIFG killing the security forces that followed the escaping prisoners into the nearby mountains, and continued when the LIFG later killed eight policemen in Derna, in June.<sup>39</sup> In July, Gaddafi responded to the attacks by orchestrating another massive sweep of arrests similar to the events in 1994.<sup>40</sup> However, Gaddafi also orchestrated an assault against the LIFG camps hidden in the mountains of Libya. Using both air and ground forces, Gaddafi nearly decimated the LIFG, yet suffered heavy losses in the process.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the events that transpired in 1994, Gaddafi was unable to dispel rumors of revolution with a cover story about stamping out drug traffickers. The use of air force jets and a substantial ground army was seen as an extreme approach to eliminating drug traffickers.<sup>42</sup> Gaddafi ruthlessly pursued members and sympathizers of the LIFG, cutting off electricity and water in towns suspected of harboring or aiding the LIFG. This tactic proved to be extremely effective, and following the death of LIFG commander Salath Fathi bin Salman in October 1997, the LIFG was left severely crippled.<sup>43</sup> Another massive sweep of arrests was made in 1998, signaling the end of the LIFG's campaign

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<sup>38</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ethan Chorin, *Exit the Colonel: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012), 55.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

against Gaddafi.<sup>44</sup> The LIFG would then remain under the radar until the 2011 Libyan Revolution.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

### AL-QAEDA AND THE LIFG

#### Post 9/11 and Gaddafi as an Ally

In the interim period of 1998-2011, the U.S. government began to draw connections between the LIFG and al-Qaeda, and the LIFG made its way onto the lists of known terrorist organizations in both the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>45</sup> While the LIFG has a long history with al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, these organizations are not linked and do not share the same goals. However, the LIFG's alleged affiliation with al-Qaeda is one of the primary reasons the LIFG has been included on the lists of known terrorist organizations in the United States and the United Kingdom. In fact, the decision to list the LIFG as a terrorist organization largely stems from Gaddafi's support in fighting al-Qaeda following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Weeks after the terrorist attacks, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents met with Musa Kusa, head of Libyan intelligence and alleged mastermind behind the 1988 Lockerbie bombing in London.<sup>46</sup> Kusa gave them the names of known LIFG operatives who had trained in Afghanistan, as well as the names of members currently living within the United Kingdom.<sup>47</sup> The Bush administration viewed this as a massive victory in intelligence, as Libyan-Afghans played a huge role in al-Qaeda history.<sup>48</sup> Shortly after

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<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, by Bureau of Counterterrorism, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>; U.K. Home Office and James Brokenshire MP, *Proscribed Terror Groups or Organisations*, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/354891/ProscribedOrganisationsAug14.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/354891/ProscribedOrganisationsAug14.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 63, 144; Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)," Hilsum, *Sandstorm*, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 144; Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

this information was obtained, the United States listed the LIFG as a terrorist organization, meaning that any state supporting the LIFG was supporting terrorism. While this exchange of information and the listing of the LIFG as a terrorist organization appear to be an exchange of favors between the U.S. and Libya, there is a history between the LIFG and al-Qaeda that supports the decision to list the LIFG as a terrorist organization. However, the history between the LIFG and al-Qaeda is egregiously inaccurate.

### The Actions of a Few

While seeking refuge from Gaddafi in 1990, LIFG members found asylum and assistance with al-Qaeda in Sudan.<sup>49</sup> This marks the beginning of the relationship that would develop between the two organizations until the LIFG's departure from Sudan in 1994.<sup>50</sup> During the course of their four-year relationship, the LIFG and al-Qaeda had only one joint operation, the June 1994 hospital and prison escape.<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting as well that al-Qaeda's involvement in this operation was purely financial, as LIFG members were the active agents in both escapes.<sup>52</sup> Following the June 1994 escapes, the LIFG was told by bin Laden to leave Sudan. This was likely due to the pressure bin Laden faced from Turabi in response to Gaddafi's deportation of Sudanese workers in Libya. The LIFG's departure from Sudan marked the ending of their relationship with al-Qaeda.

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<sup>49</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Pargeter, *Libya*, 168-9.

<sup>52</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

However, some authors argue that the LIFG's departure from Sudan in 1994 was merely a hiccup in their relationship. For example, in 1996 many LIFG members chose to follow al-Qaeda into Afghanistan and join their ranks.<sup>53</sup> Abu Anas al-Libi is often pointed to as an example of the LIFG's continued relationship with al-Qaeda. Anas al-Libi was responsible for the 1998 al-Qaeda bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>54</sup> However, an important distinction should be made when looking at these two commonly cited examples.

Anas al-Libi, as well as the LIFG members who followed bin Laden into Afghanistan, are not LIFG members, but members of al-Qaeda<sup>55</sup>. It is true that Anas al-Libi and the Libyans relocating to Afghanistan were once LIFG members. However, it is important to realize that they separated from the group in order to join al-Qaeda. In 1996, when LIFG members chose to follow bin Laden into Afghanistan and join forces with al-Qaeda, they left the LIFG behind.<sup>56</sup> Al-Qaeda's motives for violent global jihad and the destruction of the West have nothing to do with the LIFG's sole goal of removing Gaddafi from power. Additionally, Anas al-Libi's attacks in 1998 had nothing to do with LIFG motives, nor were they funded or supported by the LIFG.<sup>57</sup> The 1998 bombings were the acts of an al-Qaeda member, not an LIFG member.

The actions of specific individuals constitute nearly the whole of the LIFG's connections with al-Qaeda. Anas al-Libi, Abu Yahya al-Libi, and Abu Layth al-Libi are

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *International Terrorism Defendant Pleads Guilty in Manhattan Federal Court*, by U.S. Attorney's Office, New York, September 2014, <http://www.fbi.gov/newyork/press-releases/2014/international-terrorism-defendant-pleads-guilty-in-manhattan-federal-court>.

<sup>55</sup> Chorin, *Exit the Colonel*, 63.

<sup>56</sup> Gambill, "The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)."

<sup>57</sup> Hilsum, *Sandstorm*, 95.

often cited as examples of LIFG ties to al-Qaeda. Abu Yahya al-Libi was considered second only to Ayman al-Zawahiri in the production of al-Qaeda propaganda.<sup>58</sup> Jarret Brachman, former CIA analyst, described Yahya al-Libi as the “heir apparent to Osama bin Laden in terms of taking over the entire global jihadist movement.”<sup>59</sup>

In 2007, the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at The United States Military Academy released a report titled *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A first look at the Sinjar records*, which described both Yahya al-Libi’s and Layth al-Libi’s involvement in global jihad and the war in Iraq. The authors of the report, Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, cite a response Yahya al-Libi made to al-Qaeda’s declaration of an Islamic State in Iraq. In this response Yahya al-Libi encourages “mujahidin” across the world to support the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, ISIL, ISIS now referred to as the Islamic State IS).<sup>60</sup> Yahya al-Libi’s response is then used in the report to explain the surge and steady flow of Libyans into Iraq in 2007.

However, it is important to note that the report does not refer to Yahya al-Libi as a high ranking official within al-Qaeda, but as a member of the LIFG. Again, as in Anas al-Libi’s case, Yahya al-Libi should not be understood as a member of the LIFG as he does not represent the ideals of the organization. The same can be said for Layth al-Libi. Layth al-Libi was an operational commander in Afghanistan and a high-ranking member of al-Qaeda.<sup>61</sup> On November 3, 2007, Layth al-Libi released a video in which

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, US Military Academy, 2007), 10.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Moss, “Rising Leader for Next Phase of Al Qaeda’s War,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2008, [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/04/world/asia/04qaeda.html?\\_r=3&oref=slogin&](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/04/world/asia/04qaeda.html?_r=3&oref=slogin&).

<sup>60</sup> Felter and Fishman, *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, 9-10.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

he announced the official relationship between the LIFG and al-Qaeda. In the video Layth al-Libi states:

It is with the grace of God that we [Libyans] were hoisting the banner of jihad against this apostate 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.<sup>62</sup>

However, it should be noted again that Layth al-Libi does not speak for the LIFG, and is, first and foremost, a member of al-Qaeda. Layth al-Libi is speaking for an organization that had not committed a terrorist action since 1997, and whose few members of that organization still within Libya were imprisoned. Layth al Libi does not speak for the LIFG, nor does he have any formal backing by any LIFG leader or official. Benotman makes this idea explicitly clear in his interview with Abedin. Abedin questions Benotman about possible LIFG ties to al-Qaeda through individuals such as Anas al-Libi. Benotman responds, “The point is that these are Libyans who were not affiliated to, or involved with, the LIFG. They became associated with al-Qaeda in an individual capacity...”<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, it is through the actions of individuals like Anas al-Libi, Layth al-Libi and Yahya al-Libi that the LIFG has become associated with al-Qaeda and, subsequently, with international terrorism.

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<sup>62</sup> *As-Sahab* video released November 3, 2007, on the Al-Boraq Islamic Network; see OSC FEA20071104393586. Cited in Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records*, (West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, US Military Academy, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Mahan Abedin, Interview with Noman Benotman, “From Mujahid to Activist.”

## Linkage through Misinformation

The LIFG has never been an arm of al-Qaeda or even a sympathizer of their agenda. The LIFG's designation as an FTO relies wholly upon its alleged relationship with al-Qaeda, and without this relationship, it is difficult to defend their designation as an FTO. Starting with an insider perspective, Noman Benotman has made clear on occasions that the LIFG is not an international threat. Benotman was a founding member and former leader of the LIFG. After the terrorist attacks on 9/11 Benotman resigned from the organization and founded the U.K.-based counter-terrorism think tank Quilliam Foundation. When questioned in his interview with Abedin about sharing ideologies with al-Qaeda, Benotman responded, "There has never been a single case of a member of the LIFG being implicated in international terrorism. The LIFG has always been wholly focused on Libya. Our ultimate objective was the creation of an Islamic state in Libya."<sup>64</sup>

Benotman was not alone in his disdain for the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Prior to the attacks, LIFG leaders told bin Laden that any al-Qaeda attack on the U.S. would be Islamically illegitimate.<sup>65</sup> The only international terrorist events even remotely linked to the LIFG were the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which were committed not by the LIFG, but by an al-Qaeda member, Anas al-Libi. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the U.S. and the U.K. listed the LIFG as an FTO due to the misinformation linking al-Qaeda to the LIFG and in order to "appease" Gaddafi for his assistance in the war against al-Qaeda.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Noman Benotman, Jason Pack, and James Brandon, "Islamists," in *The 2011 Libyan Uprising and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*, ed. Jason Pack (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 202.

## CTC Reports and the LIFG Revisions

The 2007 CTC report is clear in labeling the LIFG as an arm of al-Qaeda, and therefore suspect to commit acts of international terrorism. This changed when the 2009 CTC report “LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence” was published. The report was written by Alison Pargeter, an analyst and writer specializing in North Africa and the Middle East, whose publications include *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi*. Pargeter’s report is a complete turnaround from the 2007 CTC report by Felter and Fishman.

The LIFG is first mentioned in Pargeter’s report in relation to their denouncing of violence and the process of de-radicalization the LIFG implemented with the help of Muammar Gaddafi’s son, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, in 2009.<sup>66</sup> This process involved LIFG officers then imprisoned negotiating with Saif al-Islam to create a doctrine promoting non-violence, which in return offered clemency for imprisoned LIFG members who accepted the doctrine and were subsequently released from prison. Pargeter’s article is comprised of multiple interviews with LIFG members and details gathered from human watch groups in North Africa, and helps to explain in greater detail the aspects of this process.

The doctrine, which was released in August 2009 and titled “Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir,” advocated for non-violent approaches to reform and improvements within the umma.<sup>67</sup> This 420-page document was the product of years of negotiations between Saif al-Islam and advocates for de-radicalization, like

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<sup>66</sup> Alison Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions Unlikely to Reduce Jihadist Violence,” *CTC Sentinel 2* (2009), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/lifg-revisions-unlikely-to-reduce-jihadist-violence>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Benotman. While the contents of the document cover a wide range of theological issues regarding jihad, its focus is on violence against Muslim states. This particular statement makes that clear, “arms are not for use legally or religiously to reform or bring about change in Muslim countries.”<sup>68</sup> The statement is obviously referring to armed resistance in Libya.

Following the release of “Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir”, a number of LIFG members who worked on the document, or who agreed with its contents, were released from the Abu-Salim prison in Tripoli.<sup>69</sup> However, Pargeter doubted that the document would foster change in other jihadist circles, even within Libya.<sup>70</sup> Much of this doubt stems from questions about the authenticity of the document and those agreeing with its contents. Pargeter reports that the initiative to de-radicalize the LIFG was promoted by the Libyan state in order to generate appeal in the Western world and in eastern Libya (home to many of Libya’s radicals).<sup>71</sup> She goes on to state that many members were bribed or coerced to agree to the reforms. While some members surely agreed with their new nonviolent approaches to change, it is difficult to distinguish those who actually agreed with the revisions and those who simply wanted release from prison.<sup>72</sup> Many of the LIFG members who were imprisoned and worked on this document had been in prison since 1998, the same year the LIFG went into a dormant state. Additionally, many LIFG members released in 2009 and 2011

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<sup>68</sup> Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, “Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir,” August 2009. Cited in Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions.”

<sup>69</sup> Alison Pargeter, “Are Islamist Extremists Fighting Among Libya’s Rebels?,” *CTC Sentinel* (2011) 9-13, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/are-islamist-extremists-fighting-among-libya%E2%80%99s-rebels>.

<sup>70</sup> Pargeter, “LIFG Revisions,”; Pargeter, “Are Islamist Extremists,” 9-13.

<sup>71</sup> Pargeter, “Are Islamist Extremists,” 9-13.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-13.

found themselves fighting alongside other Libyan rebels in the revolution.<sup>73</sup> The reality is that the Libyan government coordinated the 2009 revisions in order to appeal to its Western audience, and to promote peaceful reform to radicals in eastern Libya.<sup>74</sup>

However, the authenticity of the LIFG reforms is not the sole reason for Pargeter's doubt that the document will foster changes. The plan that the LIFG reforms would result in reduced jihadist activity in North Africa presumed that there was a link between the LIFG and al-Qaeda. However, Pargeter is very clear that such a link does not exist, and has never existed, between the two organizations. She quotes a number of high-ranking LIFG members who explicitly state that they have never agreed with al-Qaeda's motives and were vehemently opposed to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.<sup>75</sup> The fact that Pargeter is driving at is that the LIFG has always been an organization with a nationalist agenda. Al-Qaeda's global agenda has thus never appealed to the LIFG. Again, a quote from Benotman helps to clarify, "We refused right from the beginning to be absorbed into this group [al-Qaeda] because that would make us lose our ability to move freely and independently in Libya."<sup>76</sup> The LIFG reforms have in no way affected the jihadist activities of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), simply because the two groups have no relation to one another.

Thus, the LIFG's ties to al-Qaeda are the product of mismanaged information and the U.S. desire for such a union to exist. Events like the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, along with the announcement made by Layth al-Libi in 2007, while seemingly

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 9-13.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 9-13.

<sup>75</sup> Senior LIFG member al-Hasadi regarding al-Qaeda attacks on 9/11 "I am with fighting people on the battlefield, not with killing civilians in any place." Cited in, Pargeter, "Are Islamist Extremists," 9-13.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9-13.

incriminating, quickly lose relevance upon closer inspection. A well-informed understanding of the LIFG's motives as well as their responses to al-Qaeda's international terrorism makes it clear that violence targeting anyone other than Gaddafi and his regime is not endorsed by the LIFG. The fact of the matter is that the Western world has been conditioned to connect violent Islamic organizations with international terrorism.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION (FTO) LIST

#### Defining an FTO

The LIFG was listed by the U.S. as an FTO in December 2004, six years after the physical threat of the LIFG ended in Libya with the final wave of Gaddafi's arrests.<sup>77</sup> Politics between Bush and Gaddafi aside, the decision was made not because the LIFG constituted a real and present threat to the United States, but because any armed Islamic group was suspect to commit international terrorism.

As stated earlier, defending the LIFG's designation as an FTO is quite difficult. By U.S. legal definition, an FTO must meet three criteria:

- 1.) It must be a foreign organization
- 2.) The organization must engage in terrorist activity...or terrorism...or retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity or terrorism
- 3.) The organization's terrorist activity or terrorism must threaten the security of U.S. nationals or the national security (national defense, foreign relations, or the economic interests) of the United States.<sup>78</sup>

Without a doubt, the LIFG met the requirements of each of these criteria in 2004. Since the LIFG was based in Libya, it was clearly a foreign organization. Additionally, according to the 18 U.S. Code § 2331 – Definitions, the LIFG engaged in terrorist activities by involving themselves in violent acts against human life that are in violation of criminal laws in the United States, and by intending to influence the policy of

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<sup>77</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

government by intimidation, coercion or assassination.<sup>79</sup> Finally, the LIFG's terrorist activities did threaten national security through foreign relations with Libya. However, the issue with defining the LIFG as an FTO runs deeper than a checklist.

As commented on by individuals like Noman Benotman and Alison Pargeter, the relationship between the LIFG and al-Qaeda does not and has never existed. Additionally, their reach as an organization does not extend beyond the borders of Libya. The LIFG should be understood as a nationalist organization whose goal is to bring democratic reform to Libya through the removal of Gaddafi. While it is impossible to remove the checkmarks next to the first two criteria, a reassessment of the third checkmark is more promising.

#### “Threatening” U.S. Security

The LIFG is a “threat” to U.S. national security only in the sense that they were a threat to the U.S.'s foreign relations with Gaddafi. While this has been iterated once before, it warrants discussion again. Gaddafi's decision to aid the U.S. in combating international terrorism following the attacks on September 11, 2001, was not a gesture of goodwill, but rather a means of declaring war with U.S. backing on organizations that threatened his rule. Arguably, this is the reasoning behind the LIFG's listing as an FTO.

U.S. relations with Gaddafi play a vital role in the LIFG's designation as an FTO. The second Gulf War had a big impact on international relations with Libya. Prior to 2003, the U.S. saw Gaddafi as a mad dictator and dangerous enemy, not an ally in the war against terrorism. This perception of Gaddafi creates an interesting shift in how the

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<sup>79</sup> *Crimes and Criminal Procedure, U.S. Code 18, § 2331*, <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2331>.

LIFG is viewed. Gaddafi was viewed as an enemy of the West in the 1990s, when the LIFG was at the height of its operations and was even rumored to have received Western aid (MI6 funding). It is during this period that the West would come to understand the LIFG members as revolutionaries, or terrorists working against a common enemy. However, with the events of September 11, 2001, the LIFG members found themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum, labeled as terrorists, despite the fact that they were a nearly non-existent threat following the final wave of arrests in 1998.

However, the LIFG has yet again found themselves at the other end of the spectrum as revolutionaries. U.S.-backed North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces assisted Libyan revolutionaries in 2011, with the common goal of removing Gaddafi from power. Not surprisingly, many members of the LIFG joined revolutionary forces in the 2011 revolution.<sup>80</sup> This means that NATO forces worked alongside LIFG members, as well as Libyan revolutionaries. It is interesting to note that these forces joined together to remove Gaddafi from power, which has always been the purpose of the LIFG. However, three years later, the LIFG remains a listed FTO. This raises a number of questions that muddy the definition of terrorism from a U.S. legal perspective.

### Are Libyan Revolutionaries Terrorists?

First, if the LIFG is considered an FTO because of their use of violence against Gaddafi's regime, then by extension are all Libyan revolutionaries considered terrorists? The goal of the LIFG and the Libyan revolutionaries was the same, to remove Gaddafi

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<sup>80</sup> Pargeter, "Are Islamist Extremists," 9-13.

from power. However, Libyan revolutionaries shared the understanding with members of the LIFG that removing Gaddafi from power without the use of violence and extreme measures would be impossible. Sadly, Libyan rebels were forced to rely on violence after Gaddafi's brutal crackdowns following peaceful protests. The fact that Libyan citizens fought, bled, and died for the liberation of their country is tragic, and while violence on this scale is never condoned it is usually understood as an unavoidable outcome when dealing with tyranny. The Libyan revolutionaries were just that, revolutionaries. They fought for liberation, Libya's future, and the end of Gaddafi's tyranny. To call these people terrorists would be callus, especially considering the U.S.'s own experience with revolutions. However, no one called the Libyan revolutionaries terrorists. Yet by U.S. legal definition, they are no different than the members of the LIFG. How is it then, that Libyan revolutionaries escape the criteria of terrorism? What is the defining line between revolutionary and terrorist?

### Is NATO Supporting Terrorism?

Second, NATO's involvement in the Libyan revolution puts them in a legally precarious position. If the LIFG are considered terrorists, then NATO's military involvement in the Libyan revolution could be understood as sponsoring terrorism. NATO forces (Qatar), with the go ahead from the U.S., helped arm Libyan revolutionaries on the ground.<sup>81</sup> In addition, NATO forces from many countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway,

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<sup>81</sup> James Risen, Mark Mazzetti, and Michael S. Schmidt, "U.S.-Approved Arms for Libyan Rebels Fell into Jihadis' Hands," *The New York Times*, December 5, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/06/world/africa/weapons-sent-to-libyan-rebels-with-us-approval-fell-into-islamist-hands.html?pagewanted=all>.

Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States) assisted from the air and by sea.<sup>82</sup> NATO worked alongside Libyan revolutionaries to remove Gaddafi from power and to protect Libyan citizens. However, from a legal standpoint they supported terrorism. Yet, no one is making these claims, because NATO forces were not arming and supporting terrorists, they were helping Libyan revolutionaries and protecting the Libyan people. The question that arises from this discussion is how is it that NATO forces can assist terrorists, but not be considered state sponsors of terrorism?

### Severing Ties with Gaddafi and Delisting an FTO

Finally, the LIFG is listed as an FTO because they threatened U.S. relations with Gaddafi, thus threatening U.S. interests and security. However, on March 19, 2011, when NATO forces began their campaign against Gaddafi, U.S. relations with Gaddafi ceased to exist. The U.S. was the first country to sever relations with Gaddafi, freezing \$32 billion in Libyan assets.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the U.S., as well as Libyan revolutionaries and NATO forces, are cleared from all charges of terrorism. By legal definition, the LIFG ought not to be considered an FTO, as they are no longer threatening U.S. security and interests by straining relations between Gaddafi and the U.S, as no such relation exists. Subsequently, this means that assisting Libyan revolutionaries (and LIFG members) cannot be legally defined as sponsoring terrorism. However, there is one problem with this scenario. As of 2014, the LIFG is still listed by the U.S. as an FTO.<sup>84</sup> Despite their

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<sup>82</sup> NATO, "NATO and Libya: Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR – Key Facts and Figures," <http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/resources/24/Documents/110406-placemat-libya.pdf>.

<sup>83</sup> Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya: The Right Way to Run an Intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 91 (2012): 2.

<sup>84</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*.

shared goal with the Libyan revolutionaries, and the end of relations with Gaddafi, the LIFG are still considered a threat to U.S. security and interests.

The question that emerges from this discussion is: in what capacity are the LIFG considered a threat to the U.S.? The delisting of an FTO is handled by the Secretary of State and is often a very political process. Delisting FTOs at appropriate times can help repair relationships with countries and show that the U.S. is willing to forgive past transgressions in light of recent developments. Often, renunciations of violence and a prolonged period of time without violent attacks is reason for the U.S. to delist an organization. This was the case for the Mujahedin Khalq (MEK) in 2012.<sup>85</sup> However, there was also a great deal of money and lobbying involved to bring attention to the plea for delisting the MEK.<sup>86</sup> It seems there is no regular system in place to review FTOs periodically and to determine whether or not they still meet the criteria listed. The State Department is silent on this issue and the reasoning behind delisting FTOs is not concrete or readily available to the public. Eileen M. Decker points out in her thesis, *The Enemies List: The Foreign Terrorist Organization List and its Role in Defining Terrorism*, that, while factors such as public renunciations of violence and prolonged periods of inactive terrorist actions play a role in delisting FTOs, they are not the deciding factors.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Shashank Bengali, "U.S. to Remove Iranian Group Mujahedin Khalq from Terrorist List," *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2012. [http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world\\_now/2012/09/washington-iran-mujahedin-khalq-foreign-terrorist-iraq-removed-list.html](http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2012/09/washington-iran-mujahedin-khalq-foreign-terrorist-iraq-removed-list.html).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Eileen Decker, "The Enemies List: The Foreign Terrorist Organization List and its Role in Defining Terrorism" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 70-72.

### Discussing *The Enemies List*

Decker notes that groups such as the MEK, Revolutionary Nuclei (RN) and Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) were delisted from the FTO list due to prolonged inactivity.<sup>88</sup> However, Decker is quick to point out that there is obviously more to the delisting process than just prolonged inactivity. The LIFG's last year of reported terrorism was in 1997, while the GICM's last year of reported terrorism was in 2004. Decker attempts to define the factors that keep organizations like the LIFG listed on the FTO list, despite their dormancy. One reason that impedes the State Department from delisting dormant groups is the very real possibility of political and public outrage. Decker notes that of the nine FTOs delisted, none of them have any history of killing Americans.<sup>89</sup>

While this is an interesting fact to point out, it gives little credence to her argument, as the LIFG has never attacked the U.S. or its citizens, yet is still listed as an FTO. Decker goes on to reason that other factors, including opposition to Israel, the detraction from peace processes, relation to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and relationships with other terrorist organizations all play a role in whether or not an organization should be listed as an FTO.<sup>90</sup> However, matching the LIFG to the factors listed above is challenging. While the LIFG is an Islamist group, it does not mean they explicitly oppose Israel or seek the destruction of it. The topic of Israel is obviously a very heated issue, especially within the Islamic world. It is possible that members of the LIFG do not agree with the existence of the state of Israel, or the manner in which Israel

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<sup>88</sup> Decker, "The Enemies List," 60-69.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-95.

treats Palestinians. However, this does not mean that the LIFG as an organization is anti-Israel.<sup>91</sup> The group's motives and end goal have nothing to do with Israel.

Additionally, the LIFG pose no threat to current peace processes. While this factor had possible relevance in the 1990s, due to their operations in Libya, they have since been inactive, arguably until the 2011 Revolution. The LIFG's relation to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is non-existent. Statistically, it seems likely that LIFG members made up some of the opposition forces fighting the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Of the recorded opposition forces in 2007, 112 had Libyan origins, the second highest nationality, right behind Saudi Arabia with 244.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, Libya contributed more fighters per capita than any other nationality, nearly doubling Saudi Arabia's contribution.<sup>93</sup> However, there are two problems with this observation.

First, many LIFG members fled Libya long ago. For the very short time that the LIFG was active, Sudan was their primary base of operations. Following their expulsion from Sudan, many LIFG members fled to the U.K., as returning to Libya was dangerous. However, those who did choose to return were likely captured and imprisoned in one of Gaddafi's many sweeps of arrests. While it is possible that some members of the LIFG evaded the final wave of arrests in 1998, their numbers, if any, would be very small. Had a large portion of the LIFG remained uncaptured, operations against Gaddafi would likely have continued to occur. Therefore, the likelihood of LIFG members traveling to Iraq to participate in the opposition is very small. Most would have been in prison during this period, or were exiled abroad.

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<sup>91</sup> Manal Omar, "Libya: Rebuilding from Scratch," <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/islamists/libya-rebuilding-scratch>.

<sup>92</sup> Felter and Fishman, *Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

The second problem with this conclusion is that even if a small portion of the 112 Libyans who were in Iraq in 2007 were in fact members of the LIFG, this does not mean that the LIFG condoned such activity. Again, this is an example of a select few speaking for the entirety of the group. Additionally, Pargeter points out in her 2011 CTC report that:

It is true that Libyans, predominantly from the east, have been willing to sacrifice themselves in Iraq. This should not be confused, however, with membership or even support for the transnational aims and aspirations of al-Qa'ida. Going to fight against an occupying force in a Muslim land is very different from supporting Bin Ladin's global ambitions or even taking up arms against one's own government....One cannot conclude that all the young men in Libya who fought in Iraq were motivated by al-Qa'ida or shared its desire to target the "far enemy."<sup>94</sup>

Pargeter's point is shared with this thesis, in that the support of Iraq against U.S. occupation should not be confused with global terrorism, or in fact, any allegiance with an organization. The "defense" of Iraq is seen by many fighters as an obligation to Islam. Therefore, if any members of the LIFG were among the 112 Libyans in Iraq that year, it does not mean they were there because the LIFG demanded it. Likely, they were there for what they felt were religious obligations or for personal reasons.

Finally, Decker's point regarding an FTO's relation to terrorist organizations needs to be addressed. Again, like Decker's other points, they have an obvious truth to them, but when applied to the LIFG, they lose their applicability. It has been stated

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<sup>94</sup> Pargeter, "Are Islamist Extremists," 9-13.

numerous times within this thesis, and by credible authors, but it warrants being stated again: the LIFG has no ties to al-Qaeda. While some authors disagree on whether or not the LIFG was at one point an affiliate of al-Qaeda, this thesis has demonstrated that no such ties existed. This device of connecting the LIFG with al-Qaeda is used time and again by authors who feel the need to give weight to the organization's "terror."

Abdel Bari Atwan, author of *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation*, makes this mistake when discussing al-Qaeda influence within Libya. Atwan uses statistics regarding Libyan involvement in the Iraq war from the Sinjar records, the same records used by Felter and Fishman in their 2007 CTC report. Using this information, Atwan states "It is reasonable to assume that the proportion of the Libyan cohort in Al Qaeda as a whole is similar."<sup>95</sup> It seems this is an easy trap to fall into, as Atwan is a notable scholar of al-Qaeda. As Pargeter states, comparing the war in Iraq to the global agenda of al-Qaeda is problematic. However, without the LIFG's alleged affiliation with al-Qaeda, it is difficult to portray them as a threatening presence, especially in a post-9/11 and post-2011 Libyan Revolution world. The LIFG lacks a global agenda and its desire for a democratic Libya is not particularly menacing. However, it is worth giving these authors the benefit of the doubt in these situations. The LIFG's relationship with al-Qaeda is a tangled web of misinformation that continues to grow and support the notions that the LIFG is an international terrorist group similar to al-Qaeda.

The intent of this section is not to be overly critical or dismissive of Decker's argument regarding FTO's designations. Decker's thesis is well thought out and argued

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<sup>95</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation* (New York: The New Press, 2012): 196.

excellently. Given the silence and mystery behind many factors involving the designation and delisting of FTOs, Decker does well in speculating how the process works. However, speculating is all Decker can do. While well informed and widely applicable, these speculations do not explain why the LIFG is a listed FTO. The State Department's lack of transparency leaves the gaps to be filled by individuals like Decker, and groups like the LIFG fall into a limbo state where reasoning as to why they are listed as an FTO is unknown.

With no guidelines to measure the legitimacy of the LIFG's designation as an FTO, it becomes hard to ignore that Western biases are possibly keeping the LIFG listed. Using Decker's thesis as a jumping off point, examining Islam, Islamism, radicalism, and terrorism is key to understanding the Western perspective on the LIFG. As Decker points out, the FTO list prior to 9/11 was largely composed of communist organizations.<sup>96</sup> However, following the events of 9/11, the Western world found a new boogiemán in Islam.

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<sup>96</sup> Decker, "The Enemies List," 52-53, 73.

## CHAPTER V

### ISLAM, ISLAMISM, ISLAMIC RADICALISM AND TERRORISM

#### Defining Islam

Islam and terrorism have become synonymous in the Western world. Nightly news broadcast's need not explain to their audience that the terrorist group in question is Islamic, it seems that in the twenty-first century, this is a given. Yet anyone educated on the principles of Islam would say that Islam and terrorism are not the same thing and, in fact, cannot co-exist. However, to differentiate Islamism from radicalism or extremism is a bit more challenging. These words are often thrown around in the media and in public vernacular to mean the same thing: terrorism. The purpose of this section is to clearly define Islam, Islamism, radicalism or extremism, and terrorism.

Defining Islam is both a simple and complex task. As with any religion, Islam has numerous branches, sects, and orders that interpret religious materials differently from one another. For the purpose of this section, Islam will be defined by its orthodox tradition. When defining radicalism, different branches of Islam will be explored to give a fuller picture. Starting from a very basic level, Islam is a monotheistic religion from the Abrahamic family. This means that Islam features many of the central Abrahamic figures found in Christianity and Judaism. The actions of individuals such as Moses, Noah, Abraham, and Jesus are all part of the Islamic faith, as recorded in their holy book, the Qur'an. A defining difference between Islam and faiths such as Christianity is the transmission and accuracy of God's message becoming distorted or altered known as *tahrīf*. A common example of this is that Muslims view Jesus as a prophet of God rather than the son of God, as Christians understand him. Muslims believe that

Christians and Jews misinterpreted the prophets, therefore God revealed the entirety of his message, unaltered, to the last Prophet, Muhammad. All forms of Islam share this same story, along with the five pillars of Islam. The pillars of Islam are obligatory acts that all Muslims must abide by; they are as follows: Testimony (Shahadah), Prayer (Salat), Alms-giving (Zakat), Fasting (Sawm), and Pilgrimage (Hajj).

The common divide amongst Muslims is found in the death of Muhammad and the discrepancies surrounding whom he left in charge of the community (umma). Sunnis, the largest denomination of Muslims in the world, believe that God did not appoint any one individual to be in charge of the umma. Therefore, Sunnis believe leaders should be appointed by the umma, effectively allowing anyone to become a leader. Shias, the second largest denomination of Muslims in the world, believe that Muhammad appointed his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor. This means that only descendants of Ali can be leaders. While there are numerous branches within Islam, the Sunni and Shia branches make up the majority of Muslims in the world, and are considered orthodox. Therefore, for the purpose of this discussion, when the term orthodox is used to describe Islam, it is referring to the very basic understanding of Sunni and Shia Islam.

Using this rudimentary understanding of orthodox Islam, the LIFG can be framed into the discussion. Libya is predominantly Muslim, with 96.6% of all Muslims in Libya being Sunni.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the LIFG is a Sunni organization. However, it is important to understand that the LIFG is an orthodox Sunni organization,

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<sup>97</sup> Central Intelligence Agency *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>.

not to be confused with groups like al-Qaeda who are also classified as a Sunni organization. Exploring Islamism will help to further differentiate the LIFG from groups like al-Qaeda.

### Defining Islamism

Islamism can be understood as a form of political Islam. At its core, Islamism promotes the belief that Islam should govern the social and political spheres. However, like any ideology, there are various interpretations and strategies used to implement these changes. An article published by the International Crisis Group in 2005, categorizes Islamism into three groups: Political, Missionary, and Jihadi. The Political group's ultimate goal is to achieve political power at a national level. Organizations that operate within this group accept the nation-state they wish to attain power in, and pursue non-violent avenues to achieve their goal (unless threatened by foreign occupation). The Missionary group's ultimate goal is to preserve Muslim identity and Islamic faith within the community. Last, the Jihadi group uses violence to achieve reform within the government. Jihadi groups have three subsections based on the target of their violence. Internal groups target Muslim governments that are believed to be corrupt. Irredentist groups target lands ruled or occupied by non-Muslims. Finally, global groups target Western civilization.<sup>98</sup>

While this categorization offered by the International Crisis Group is useful in addressing the differences between Islamist groups, it unfortunately does not account for all groups. Some Islamist organizations overlap these categories. For instance,

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<sup>98</sup> "Understanding Islamism," International Crisis Group, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/037-understanding-islamism.aspx>.

Hamas utilizes violence, and therefore would be categorized within the Jihadi group alongside al-Qaeda. However, Hamas and al-Qaeda have vastly different views on politics. Hamas is an active proponent and participant of democratic politics, while al-Qaeda rejects any form of democracy. This creates confusion as to whether or not groups like Hamas should be categorized as Political or Jihadi. While Hamas utilizes violence to achieve their goals, they also utilize democratic political avenues. Additionally, the clause within Political groups notes the acceptance of violence when used against a foreign occupation. It could be argued that Hamas' actions are the product of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and therefore Hamas' actions are justifiably Political.

To help stabilize this categorization, some minor modifications should be made. Political groups should be understood as organizations that pursue legitimacy through proper political avenues, and do not use, or have renounced, violence as a means of attaining power. While similar to the International Crisis Group's definition, note that the clause regarding violence against foreign occupations has been removed. The political groups defined by this revision never utilize violence, even in the face of oppression through foreign occupation.

The Jihadi group will be dissected into two separate groups. The first group is a mixture of the Jihadi and Political groups called Politically Violent. Politically Violent groups should be understood as organizations that utilize violence to fight against corrupt Islamic regimes or lands under foreign occupation. Upon removal of corrupt Islamic regimes or foreign occupation, the group pursues legitimacy through proper political channels. Note that violence towards the West is not included in this group. The

second group from the Jihadi classification is the Violent group. Violent groups should be understood as organizations that utilize violence to fight against corrupt Islamic regimes, lands under foreign occupations, and the West. Victory for these organizations does not mean the beginning of a democratic process. The reasoning behind the split of the Jihadi group is outlined above.

Often, Islamist organizations that use politics, or politics and violence, to reach their goals are nationalist groups. Their goal is not global, and is therefore restricted to the actors within their country. Violence in this case is used as an avenue to liberate, or create a secure platform within, the country to facilitate political channels to create change. This is in stark contrast to Violent groups, whose goals are often global, and therefore target bodies like Western civilization. The objective of these organizations is not to pursue legitimacy through democratic process but to impose rule through violence and violence alone. The creation of the Violent groups categorizes organizations like al-Qaeda into a confined group, where its goals cannot be confused with the goals of other organizations who utilize violence. After revisions, the list is as follows: Political, Missionary (no changes made), Politically Violent, and Violent.

Jihadi was removed from the list as it helps to perpetuate the belief that jihad equals violence. Every categorization within the list of Islamists could be understood as Jihadi, as jihad simply refers to the struggle or resistance to fulfill religious duties. While the newly revised list will obviously have some issues with categorization, it is a step towards a better system of classification. The new list allows for organizations like Hamas to be clearly defined by the Politically Violent category which helps to differentiate them from organizations that condemn violence and organizations that

condemn the democratic process. It also confines organizations like al-Qaeda to a category of their own. Additionally, this new list allows for the LIFG to be properly categorized.

Using what is known about the LIFG and their motives, it only makes sense to place them in the Politically Violent group. The organization consciously chose violence as a means of resistance to Gaddafi's corrupt Islamic regime, and their ultimate goal was to facilitate a democratic Libya created by the people. It's important to note that prior to the revision of the Islamist list, the LIFG would have been listed as a Jihadi group. Knowing the goals of the LIFG, it seems unjust to classify them in a category shared with al-Qaeda. Therefore, the LIFG and similar organizations benefit from this revision.

### Defining Islamic Radicalism

Having placed the LIFG into the Islamist spectrum, the next step is to discuss Islamic radicalism/extremism and determine how the LIFG fit in. Islamic radicalism/extremism is the extremely conservative view of Islam that is far outside the views of orthodox Islam. While violence is not a necessary component of radicalism/extremism, its adherents often practice it. The terms radicalism and extremism can be used interchangeably, as they both carry the same connotations of "far outside the orthodox." However, the words "extremism" and "extremist" are more likely to be found in the Western world when discussing Islamic groups than the words "radicalism" and "radicals." This is because the words "extremism" and "extremist" are used as exonyms. In the U.S., there exist radical democrats and republicans, not extremist democrats and republicans. While the definitions of these words are the

same, their implications are not. Extremism is used as a pejorative, classifying as negative the type of radical or extreme approach taken.

The Wahhabi movement is an excellent example of Islamic radicalism. Wahhabism is an extremely orthodox religious movement within the Sunni branch of Islam. Similar to Islamism, Wahhabism understands Islam as a complete way of life. Adherents believe social behavior as well as political structure can be found within Islam, and they must adhere to these guidelines. Wahhabism is often discussed in tandem with Saudi Arabia and Sharia. Saudi Arabia is predominantly composed of Wahhabis, and its legislation is entirely based in Sharia. This means that no penal codes exist outside of Sharia. All court systems, punishments, and laws are derived from Sharia. To many Westerners, Sharia is viewed as a backwards and oppressive system. This attitude is then often associated with Wahhabism, which is then associated with Islamism, as Islamists and Wahhabis both define themselves as using Islam to guide social and political spheres. In turn, this often associates Islamism with radicalism and subsequently oppressive, anti-democratic ruling. However, there are a number of issues that should be pointed out in this chain association.

The first issue is the belief that all Islamists are radicals. This is simply not the case, as many orthodox Islamist groups exist. The LIFG is an excellent example of an orthodox Islamist group. The goal of the LIFG was to liberate Libya from Gaddafi's oppressive regime, which promoted a perverted vision of Islam. Following the removal of Gaddafi, the LIFG hoped to replace his regime with a democratically ruled Libya, where orthodox Islam could be practiced without fear of punishment. The second issue is the belief that Islamism and democracy are not mutually agreeable ideologies. This is

the widespread assumption throughout the Western world, that Islam is inherently anti-democratic.<sup>99</sup> However, there are examples of Islam and democracy working together. Iran, in fact, has a popularly elected parliament, and the Arab Spring has shown that other Middle Eastern peoples are also interested in democratic systems. Tunisia, for example, chose democracy in their path to personal liberty. It should also be noted that the LIFG promoted a democratic Libya. This section should make it evident that not all Islamist groups are radicals and anti-democratic. For example, the LIFG are Islamists whose religious views are orthodox, and whose political views are democratic.

### Defining Terrorism and its Relation to Insurgency

The last issue to discuss in this section is terrorism. Defining terrorism is not an easy task, and nearly two hundred academic and government definitions exist.<sup>100</sup> In their work, “How Religious is ‘Islamic’ Religious Terrorism?”, John David Payne, Donna Lee Bowen, and Joseph Woolstenhulme point out that one of the major issues with defining terrorism is its usage to describe widely disparate phenomena.<sup>101</sup> The definition used by the authors of this article is the Department of Defense’s (DoD) definition, the same definition used by this thesis: “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Lawrence Davidson, *Islamic Fundamentalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), 64; Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Fundamentalism Since 1945* (London: Routledge, 2014), 143.

<sup>100</sup> John David Payne, Donna Lee Bowen, and Joseph Wollstenhulme, “How Religious is ‘Islamic’ Religious Terrorism?,” in *Religion and Terrorism: The Use of Violence in Abrahamic Monotheism*, ed. Veronica Ward and Richard Sherlock (New York: Lexington Books, 2014): 121.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>102</sup> Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 255. Cited in Ward and Sherlock, *Religion and Terrorism*, 123.

Terrorism carries many negative connotations, and is therefore thrown around in order to deliberately mislabel events to give them more weight.<sup>103</sup> The authors identify an excellent example of this mislabeling by examining a comment made by U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld: “I think that any time people, innocent men, women and children are being killed that is, in effect, the definition of terrorism.”<sup>104</sup> The authors point out that Rumsfeld seems to be referring to non-combatants in his comment, yet this comment was made when discussing Pakistani-supported militants operating in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Rumsfeld, in this comment, is likening soldiers to civilians, and the authors theorize that this is because insurgent attacks are considered morally transgressive, and therefore designated as terrorist actions. The authors go on to compare the implementation of improvised explosive devices used in Iraq to kill unaware soldiers as terrorism.<sup>105</sup> There are two points to take away from this discussion. First, that terrorism is being confused with insurgency and, second, that terms are defined by their moral implications.

To address the first issue, insurgency must first be defined. The DoD defines insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”<sup>106</sup> Comparing this definition to the DoD’s definition of terrorism creates some confusion regarding the differences between the two terms. Both definitions describe the use of violence to gain political control of a region. The only noticeable difference between these two definitions is the use of

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<sup>103</sup> Payne, Lee, and Woolstenhulme, *Religion and Terrorism*, 121.

<sup>104</sup> Donald Rumsfeld, “Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability in New Delhi,” U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, June 12, 2002. Cited in Ward and Sherlock, *Religion and Terrorism*, 122.

<sup>105</sup> Payne, Lee, and Woolstenhulme, *Religion and Terrorism*, 122.

<sup>106</sup> Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 127.

religion in describing terrorism and the word “unlawful.” This leaves readers with the impression that if religion is the motivation for an organization’s attacks, then it is terrorism, because insurgency cannot be religiously motivated. However, this does not address the issue that an organization’s motivation may be political. How would one define a politically motivated organization that uses violence to achieve political goals?

In order to clear the confusion surrounding these definitions, it is best to examine alternative definitions. Lt. Col. Michael F. Morris proposed in his research project titled “Al-Qaeda as Insurgency,” that insurgency should be defined as a combination of political programs and violence in pursuit of revolutionary purposes.<sup>107</sup> Morris comes to this conclusion using Bard O’Neill’s definition of insurgency:

A struggle between a nonruling group and the ruling authorities in which the nonruling group consciously uses *political* resources (e.g., organizational expertise, propaganda, and demonstrations) and *violence* to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics.<sup>108</sup>

Using O’Neill’s definition of insurgency, Morris is able to create a definition of terrorism that helps differentiate the two terms. Morris states, “Terrorists may pursue political, even revolutionary, goals, but their violence replaces rather than complements a political program.”<sup>109</sup> Simply put, terrorism favors violence over political action, and insurgency balances the use of violence and political action.

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<sup>107</sup> Michael F. Morris, “Al-Qaeda as Insurgency” (Master of Strategic Studies Degree research project, U.S. Army War College, 2005).

<sup>108</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1990), 13. Cited in Morris, “Al-Qaeda as Insurgency,” 2.

<sup>109</sup> Morris, “Al-Qaeda as Insurgency.”

Morris' definition is radical in the sense that it calls for a serious reevaluation of "terrorist" organizations. The focus of Morris' study, al-Qaeda, is arguably defined as an Islamic insurgency rather than a terrorist organization. Morris comes to this conclusion based on evidence of al-Qaeda's political ambitions and the political channels they pursue to achieve their goals. Perhaps the most important point to take away from Morris' study is the purpose and effect in differentiating terrorists from insurgents. Morris concludes that insurgencies, like al-Qaeda, must be recognized as organizations that boast political powers that threaten political reform in the Islamic world.<sup>110</sup> Treating al-Qaeda as a terrorist organization only addresses issues surrounding their use of violence. In order to respond properly to the threat of al-Qaeda, tactics used to combat insurgency, such as delegitimizing their political arm and supporting true political reform, must be used alongside tactics used to combat terrorism.

Applying this definition to the LIFG, the organization should be understood as an insurgency rather than a terrorist organization. While violence has been the primary tool to achieve liberation in Libya, the LIFG has already been established as a Politically Violent Islamist organization. Violence is only used to reach the stage in which proper political channels can be pursued. While Morris' research helps reevaluate the manner in which the U.S. should confront insurgencies, it does not address the moral implications behind the words "terrorism" and "insurgency."

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

## The Impact of Orientalism

Returning to Payne et.al's work, the moral implications behind insurgency and terrorism are the driving factors behind the words' everyday usage. Rumsfeld used the word terrorism, not because it fit the definition of the Pakistani-supported militants, because it did not, but because it carried the moral implications that the Pakistani-supported militants were in the wrong or "evil." Terrorism in its modern usage is completely subjective. It is thrown around by various parties to demonize organizations, rather than define them by the actions they implement. Herein lies the root of the problem surrounding the usage of the word terrorism. It is difficult for the West to separate Islam from terrorism. These words are interchangeable to Westerners, as are Islam and anti-democracy. This is largely the product of a greater issue treated by Edward Said: Orientalism. The effects of Orientalism on the West's perception and interactions with the Islamic world are long lasting, and continue to dominate.

Terrorism will continue to be associated with Islam as long as the public consensus believes that Muslims are backwards, violent, and anti-democratic people. Subsequently, the word "terrorism" will continue to carry moral implications used to define an enemy. Orientalism is the root cause of the association of all of these words described in this section. Islam, Islamism, radicalism, and terrorism are used as synonymous words in western vernacular, because the West has been conditioned through years of misinformation and polemical histories to understand the Islamic world as backwards, violent, misogynistic, anti-democratic, and, most importantly, the enemy of the West.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978).

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE (LIMC) AND THE FUTURE OF LIBYA

#### The End of the LIFG

There are a number of dates one could assign to the end of the LIFG. Some would argue the LIFG ended in 1998, following the final massive wave of arrests. However, the organization lived on in secrecy, and in prisons like Abu-Salim. Others would argue the LIFG ended in 2009, with the release of *Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Hisbah and Takfir* and its call to end violence and change in Libya. However, as this thesis has outlined, the circumstances surrounding these revisions were dubious, cemented in coercion and the promise of freedom.

However, the LIFG did not truly end until 2011, with the emergence of the Revolution. In London, on February 15, 2011, Anis al-Sharif announced the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change (LIMC) as the successor of the LIFG.<sup>112</sup> However, Manal Omar, director of the North Africa, Iraq, and Iran programs for the United States Institute of Peace, and member of the Libya Stabilization Team, dates the transition to August 2011.<sup>113</sup> Regardless of when this transition occurred, it is important to note that it was a product of the revolution.

The full extent of the LIFG's involvement in the revolution is unknown. Some authors argue that LIFG members played a pivotal role in military victory for the rebels.<sup>114</sup> Young revolutionaries lacking guidance and skills with combat and weapons

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<sup>112</sup> Omar Ashour, *Libyan Islamists Unpacked: Rise, Transformation, and Future* (2012), 4.

<sup>113</sup> Omar, "Libya: Rebuilding from Scratch."

<sup>114</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44-45.

looked to LIFG members as leaders.<sup>115</sup> The accuracy of these claims is difficult to establish, as the LIFG lacked any semblance of leadership during the revolution. This is largely due to the fact that the organization, by this point, existed only in spirit. LIFG members shared the belief that a Gaddafi-free Libya was a better Libya, and upon release from prison in 2011, many LIFG members found that the public shared this sentiment.

This is an incredibly important moment for the LIFG. Members of the organization no longer needed to seek out other members to confide in. The desire of the LIFG was now the desire of the greater Libyan public. In 1997, Omar Rashed, spokesman for the LIFG, stated:

The Libyan people in general have not passed beyond the stage of sentiment to the stage of action...we are suffering from the absence of the people in confronting Gaddafi and his regime, despite their rejection of his rule and despite their enmity towards him.<sup>116</sup>

This was the moment the LIFG had been waiting twenty-one years for. Members of the LIFG fought in the revolution not as members of an organization long since dormant, but as Libyans. Ex-leader of the LIFG, Abdel Hakim Belhaj, makes this sentiment clear in an interview with the *New York Times*, “The February 17th revolution is the Libyan people’s revolution and no one can claim it, neither secularists nor Islamists.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Pargeter, “Are Islamist Extremists,” 9-13.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Omar Rashed, LIFG spokesman in *Al-Nida’ul-Islam*, April 26-May 1999. Cited in Atwan, *After Bin Laden*, 205.

<sup>117</sup> Rod Nordland, “In Libya, Former Enemy is Recast in Role of Ally,” *The New York Times*, September 1, 2011. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/world/africa/02islamist.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/world/africa/02islamist.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

## Belhaj and the LIMC

Belhaj is mostly noted for his involvement in the 2011 Libyan Revolution.

Appointed leader of the Tripoli Military Council (TMC) following the capture of Tripoli in August, Belhaj was instrumental in coordinating with NATO forces as well as Libyan rebels.<sup>118</sup> However, perhaps more important to this study is Belhaj's involvement in the LIMC. Belhaj, cited as the co-founder of the LIMC, is somewhat of a celebrity in post-Gaddafi Libya, which brought a great deal of attention to the LIMC.<sup>119</sup> Belhaj was a member of the Libyan National Transition Council (NTC) which ruled Libya for a period of ten months before holding the elections for the General National Congress (GNC), at which time power was handed over to the GNC.<sup>120</sup> This transition of power from the NTC to the GNC marked the first time in Libyan history that power had switched hands without violence or a coup.

However, before this transition was made, Belhaj helped to break barriers regarding the image of Islamist groups like the LIMC. In March 2011, the LIMC agreed to come under the command of the NTC, thus showing a willingness to work under a central authority that did not directly support their goals, and to work alongside other parties.<sup>121</sup> This was a monumental step in improving the image of the LIMC and, in general, Islamists. Additionally, Belhaj helped communicate that, while secular interests threatened Islamism, this should not be confused with an anti-democratic political view. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Belhaj stated:

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Omar, "Libya: Rebuilding from Scratch."

<sup>120</sup> Jomana Karadsheh, "Libya's Transitional Council Hands Over Power," August 9, 2012. <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/08/world/meast/libya-power-transition/>.

<sup>121</sup> Omar, "Libya: Rebuilding from Scratch."

What worries us is the attempt of some secular elements to isolate and exclude others. Libya's Islamists have announced their commitment to democracy; despite this, some reject their participation and call for them to be marginalised. It is as though they want to push Islamists towards a non-democratic option by alienating and marginalising them.<sup>122</sup>

Breaking down the connection that Islamism is anti-democratic is integral to Libya's future and is a sentiment shared throughout the LIMC. Allowing Islamists to pursue legitimacy through current political debates and votes is the only way Libya will find stability. The product of ignoring and marginalizing these groups, as Belhaj stated, is now the current reality within Libya.

### The Future of Libya

The GNC is largely secular, and the reality of an Islamist state is threatening to the interim government. Because of this, the GNC has not allowed Islamists the proper political channels to represent and voice their concerns regarding the future of Libya. These are the same circumstances the LIFG found themselves in twenty-one years ago. Left without proper political channels to pursue legitimacy, Islamists feel they must resort to violence. Armed Islamist groups have chased the GNC out of Tripoli and continue to threaten the stability of Libya's future. While the lack of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) are just as much to blame for these events, the underlying problem is in marginalizing these groups.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Abdel Hakim Belhaj, "The Revolution Belongs to All Libyans, Secular or Not," *The Guardian* September 27, 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/sep/27/revolution-belongs-to-all-libyans>.

<sup>123</sup> Ashour, "Libyan Islamists Unpacked," 7.

If Libya is to ever stabilize, a number of issues must be resolved. The first issue is working towards DDR. Dismantling and disarming militias across Libya is the only way the GNC will ever be recognized as the central authority. However, doing so is incredibly difficult, as militias stay armed because they do not trust the GNC to protect their neighborhoods and cities. The formation of a single unified military force, comprised of militias across Libya, is needed to convey that the GNC has the power to protect Libya, and that if militias feel the need to protect their cities they can do so under a central authority. However, such a task is challenging, as militias across Libya are often at odds with one another.

The second issue that must be resolved is providing Islamists the proper channels to represent themselves. If one thing is certain about Libya's future, it is that it will be an Islamic state. Everyone, even the GNC, would agree to this. While this seems contradictory, the GNC and other Libyan secularists understand Islamists as the West does. They fear that with an Islamist party in charge, democracy will be thrown out. However, organizations like the LIMC understand that Islamism and democracy can not only co-exist, but in some capacity, must work together, as the alternative is chaos.<sup>124</sup> In an interview with a Libyan fighter from Derna who traveled and fought in Afghanistan multiple times, the Libyan fighter made it clear that democracy is the only way. He stated, "We saw Muslims fight before.... Neither was Afghanistan liberated, nor was the Islamic state established.... [We] had enough. We want to raise our kids in a safe society."<sup>125</sup> Islamist power without democracy has been experienced by not only this

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<sup>124</sup> Ashour, "Libyan Islamists Unpacked,"; Belhadj, "The Revolution Belongs."

<sup>125</sup> Ashour, "Libyan Islamists Unpacked," 6.

fighter from Derna, but also many other Libyans who fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Algeria.<sup>126</sup> This is what fuels the fear of an Islamist state, and it is why Islamists find themselves politically silenced. Yet it is this treatment which forces Islamist states to resort to violence, thus fulfilling the fears of those who oppose them. In order to stabilize Libya, democracy must be allowed to take its course. This means allowing every party, regardless of its stance, the freedom to voice its concerns for Libya's future. This also means laying down weapons so that decisions can be carried out without the threat of violence.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 6.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary of Hypotheses

Throughout this thesis, a number of hypotheses were presented regarding the LIFG and the means by which the organization is defined. An in-depth analysis of the organization's history set the stage for the LIFG's formation. Gaddafi's oppressive regime and perverted vision of Islam created an environment conducive to breeding insurgency. The LIFG, unfortunately, felt that violence was the only path available to achieve its goal of a democratic Libya. Through careful analysis of its past, the LIFG's motivations and actions were laid out and properly contextualized in later sections.

Part of this contextualization included the LIFG's relationship, or rather lack of a relationship, with al-Qaeda. Using the history of the LIFG and the limits of its motivations and actions, this thesis was able to dispel the myth of the LIFG's ties to al-Qaeda. Additionally, it helped to further define the organization's reach by comparing it to global terrorist organizations. In turn, this helped argue for the LIFG's delisting from the U.S. FTO list. By defining an FTO, and examining their qualifications, this thesis concluded that the LIFG's listing is unwarranted and grounded in misinformation.

Clearing up the confusion surrounding the LIFG as a terrorist organization allowed for the group to be examined for what it truly is, an Islamist group. Establishing groundwork for this discussion, definitions were provided for Islam, Islamism, radical Islam, terrorism, and insurgency. Using this information, the LIFG, as well as Islamist groups in general, were categorized in terms that better fit their reach and agendas. Additionally, this section's discussion of Edward Said's Orientalism helped contextualize

the current confusion and bias surrounding the definitions of the terms discussed and the Western perception of the Islamic world.

Finally, this thesis discussed the end of the LIFG and the birth of the LIMC. The future of the LIMC and Libya is dependent on the approach the interim government takes with Islamist groups in Libya. Marginalizing Islamist groups puts them in a position similar to the one the LIFG found themselves in twenty-one years ago. If Libya is to stabilize, the myth must be shattered that Islamism and anti-democracy are synonymous. This thesis has demonstrated that organizations like the LIMC are making strides toward democratic Islamism and are willing to adjust accordingly.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

A number of topics were discussed in this thesis that could not be fully examined, as the contents of their discussion would not only weigh down the thesis, but deserve a study of their own. Research regarding the FTO list should definitely be pursued. Eileen M. Decker's *The Enemies List* is a great starting point for this project, but more attention needs to be brought to the topic. The implementation of an FTO revision project could significantly clear up the list, freeing up the money and manpower dedicated to the surveillance of these organizations. Additionally, it would help mend relations with nations who came under heavy accusation after 9/11. Additional research regarding the FTO list could also help to clarify the dynamics of the process, and perhaps allow for a better system to be put in place, thus preventing misconceived listings. However, it should be noted that transparency is largely the issue in regards to the FTO list. The extent of what the State Department is willing to reveal is the extent to which proper research can be conducted.

A very difficult task would be identifying and analyzing Islamist groups active in Libya today. The limits of this thesis allowed for only the LIFG to be discussed, but they are not the only Islamist actors in Libya. The Muslim Brotherhood, The Party of Liberation (Hizb al-Tahrir), and numerous Wahhabi groups are fighting for a voice and for the future of Libya. The extent of the role these organizations played in the years leading up to the revolution, the revolution itself, and the rebuilding of the nation is incredibly important to the greater history of Libya and the function of Islamist groups. In the same vein, attention should be brought to the extent that groups like al-Qaeda (present as the AQIM) can influence the future of Libya.

Finally, a great deal of research could be conducted regarding the ongoing conflict in Libya. Rebuilding Libya will not be an easy feat, and will likely take many years to complete. Issues regarding the assembly of a government, giving Islamists proper political channels to express their opinions, and removing armed militias are just the beginning of Libya's struggle to rebuild. The research possibilities regarding the reconstruction of Libya are numerous and will continue to grow as the country and its people begin to find their place in the free world.

### Conclusions

This thesis set out to prove that the LIFG should not be understood as a terrorist organization, and it has hopefully succeeded in convincing readers. On the basis of the evidence, analysis, and conclusions presented in this thesis, the LIFG should be understood as a Politically Violent Islamist organization. Using this revised definition and removing the LIFG from the U.S. FTO list would be a monumental step in reconciling differences between the Libyan revolutionaries and the U.S. government.

Additionally, the groundwork laid out in this thesis should be used as a basis for identifying and researching all listed FTOs and Islamist organizations. The process of re-categorizing these groups and ceasing the flow of misinformation will not only help to improve foreign relations between the U.S. and the Islamic world, but will also contribute to the revised history of the Islamic world in a post-Orientalism world. Delisting the LIFG is but a small step on the road to repairing relations between the West and the Islamic world, but even the smallest spark can start a revolution.

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