

# To engage or not engage? Libyan Salafis and state institutions

Virginie Collombier and Fiona Barsoum



**HYRES Research Note**

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Visiting address: C.J. Hambros plass 2d  
Address: PB 7024 St. Olavs Plass  
0130 OSLO, NORWAY  
Internet: [www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no)  
E-mail: [post@nupi.no](mailto:post@nupi.no)  
Fax: [+ 47] 22 99 40 50  
Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

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### **HYRES – Hybrid Pathways to Resistance in the Islamic World**

HYRES studies the interaction between Islamist movements and the state in the cases of Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Mali, and is designed to answer the following question: Why do some Islamist groups pursue their political and religious project within the state to which they belong – while other Islamist groups refuse to accept these borders, seeking instead to establish new polities, such as restoring the Islamic Caliphate?

HYRES is funded by the Norwegian Research Council. For further information about HYRES see [https://www.nupi.no/nupi\\_eng/About-NUPI/Projects-centres-and-programmes/Hybrid-paths-to-resistance-in-the-Muslim-world-Iraq-Lebanon-Libya-and-Mali](https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/About-NUPI/Projects-centres-and-programmes/Hybrid-paths-to-resistance-in-the-Muslim-world-Iraq-Lebanon-Libya-and-Mali).

## Introduction

At the beginning of the recent escalation of hostilities in Libya in April 2019, one of the key questions posed was what role, if any, quietist Salafis would play. Followers of this trend have grown significantly in influence in recent years, including in the security sphere and government institutions. As a result, their decisions, especially those regarding military engagement, have the potential to have important consequences at the national level. The fact that these “quietist” Salafis in Libya are armed already poses interesting ideological questions. Moreover, the fact that their behaviour during the recent fighting in Tripoli<sup>i</sup> has been somewhat unpredictable indicates that their ideology of obedience to the sitting ruler requires further interrogation.

This research brief looks at the way in which the quietist Salafis have evolved to gain such a strong position in Libya, assessing their behaviour in four distinct periods. It contrasts this behaviour with other Salafi trends in Libya, particularly the political Salafism associated with certain former leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). It argues that Libyan Salafis have adapted and renegotiated ideologies in the changing political context after 2011. More than pure ideology, the way in which they have responded to the constraints and opportunities created by this context has been the key factor in the evolution of the different groups and ultimately their fortunes.

## 2011 – old constraints, new opportunities

The uprising of 2011 opened up new opportunities for Libyan Salafis. Prior to this, their ability (or otherwise) to operate had been determined to a large extent by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi (1969-2011), which sought to manipulate the religious sphere to ensure its continuity. As a result of Gaddafi’s policies to weaken religious institutions to promote his own interpretation of Islam and to restrict meaningful participation in politics, Salafism essentially developed in Libya around the two distinct, partly divergent trends of Salafism known in academic literature as “jihadist” and “quietist”.<sup>ii</sup>

The first current, epitomised by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), constituted at the same time part of the opposition to the regime in the 1990s and a component of the global jihadist sphere.<sup>iii</sup> It faced severe repression, resulting in significant losses and hundreds being imprisoned. Part of the imprisoned leadership showed a level of ideological flexibility and renounced the use of violence to drive political change in the 2000s.<sup>iv</sup> However, others in the broader LIFG networks (mostly among the younger generation) opposed this recantation and

continued to promote armed action, albeit generally outside Libya.<sup>v</sup> The evolution of the LIFG thus demonstrates the way in which the constraints implemented by the regime contributed to the shaping of their ideology and strategy.

The second main Salafi current was largely inspired by Saudi and Yemeni preachers who strongly rejected political activity and advocated unconditional support to the ruler (the *wali al-amr*).<sup>vi</sup> It was promoted by the regime itself as it sought to counter its Islamist opponents in the 2000s. The key role played in the 1990s by the Islamic university of Medina where Saudi Sheikh Rabi' al-Madkhali taught in the diffusion of this brand of Salafism worldwide contributed to its followers subsequently being referred to as "Madkhalis", though the quietist trend is more diverse than this.<sup>vii</sup> A number of Libyan preachers emerged as a result of the Gaddafi regime's effort to promote a Libyan Salafi movement supportive of the regime.<sup>viii</sup> Yet they generally lacked strong theological credentials.<sup>ix</sup> Moreover, the absence of strong national religious institutions meant that the quietist movement remained largely uninstitutionalised, and the different ideological tendencies in its midst ill-defined.

The start of the 2011 uprising in Libya radically altered this context. It was predictable that jihadists would join the uprising. However, for other Salafists it posed more of a question. Although certain former LIFG leaders had publicly recanted the use of violence for political change, they nevertheless took part in the uprising. The position of quietists was less clear, as their ideological references, including Sheikh Rabi' al-Madkhali himself,<sup>x</sup> issued conflicting fatwas<sup>xi</sup> or delivered fatwas relatively late during the uprising. As a result, some quietists followed fatwas not to participate, while others joined the revolutionary movement.

As such, a variety of groups and figures who shared common Salafi references engaged in the 2011 uprising against Gaddafi, sometimes playing key military roles. For example, both former LIFG emir Abdulhakim Belhaj and Hashim Bishr, an educated, religiously conservative revolutionary,<sup>xii</sup> were both among the leaders of the revolutionary brigades that fought in the Nafusa Mountains and then to liberate Tripoli. However, their specific ideological stances and political objectives were at the time rather ill-defined.

## 2011-2013 political participation versus moral order

The collapse of the regime and the political transition placed Libyan Salafis in yet another new context: the creation of new political, religious and security institutions allowed possibilities for participation. Yet this also required Salafis to clarify their stance towards politics and political action, both in the sense of party politics and relationship to the nascent state administration. This was in some respects an ideological decision. However, the strength of the revolutionary narrative within the power centres leading institution-building efforts provided different Salafi currents with different opportunities and constraints.

A new, explicitly “political” brand of Salafism rapidly emerged, notably embodied by some former leaders of the LIFG. A quietist trend (re)emerged among those who rejected party politics but accepted state authority. However, it remained local in character and less visible on the national scene as no well-known, emblematic figure emerged that was able to rally those Salafi revolutionaries who shared this vision. This period was thus instrumental in (re)creating certain divisions within the Salafi sphere in part obscured during the revolution.

For LIFG figures, the revolutionary narrative provided a major opportunity to engage in and shape state institutions.<sup>xiii</sup> The important roles they had played in the armed uprising provided former leading members of the group with significant revolutionary and military legitimacy. They immediately attempted to translate this into influence within the new state security institutions. Belhaj, for example, was appointed head of the Tripoli Military Council in August 2011 (before being side-lined later the same year). Similarly, former LIFG leader Khalid al-Sharif<sup>xiv</sup> set up the National Guard in late 2011.<sup>xv</sup>

With new opportunities also opening up in the political sphere, former leading members of the LIFG had to make a decision on their willingness to engage in party politics. Deciding in favour of political participation, Belhaj and former LIFG ideologue Sami Saadi both formed political parties and stood as candidates for the 2012 elections to the first transitional legislature, the General National Congress (GNC). Although they were not particularly successful - Belhaj failed to gain a single party list seat<sup>xvi</sup> - they came early on to exemplify a form of political Salafism that sought to shape the state from within institutions. This was also a top down approach based on engaging at the national level.



The decision of the former LIFG leaders to become involved in party politics was opposed on ideological grounds by an important part of the Salafi sphere, which strongly rejected democracy and elections on the grounds that legislation belongs to God and that party politics is *fitna*, a source of division for the community of believers. This included Salafi-jihadi groups such as Ansar al-Sharia in eastern Libya, that gained popularity through its grassroots social work in Benghazi, Derna and Ajdabiya.<sup>xvii</sup> Opponents also included religious figures belonging to the quietist Salafi current.<sup>xviii</sup>

However, the opposition of quietists to party politics did not necessarily extend to state institutions. The association of this trend with preachers who had encouraged their followers not to engage in the uprising meant that they did not have the same opportunity to engage directly with the nascent state institutions and obtain high-level positions. Instead, they privileged a form of action aimed at ensuring order at the grassroots level. In the eastern Tripoli suburb of Souq al-Jouma, for example, young Salafis began to form neighbourhood vigilante groups focused on imposing order within the local society. This was both in the sense of security and enforcing a particular moral and religious order.<sup>xix</sup> Efforts to combat drugs and alcohol helped them gain some legitimacy at the local level; however, their exclusionary views and intolerance towards other religious trends, evidenced through practices such as the destruction of Sufi shrines, were more contentious.<sup>xx</sup>

Thus, while engagement with state institutions on the part of these groups appeared limited – as they explicitly rejected participation in the new political game and acted primarily at the local level – a number of Salafis who had been involved to some degree in the uprising took advantage of the competition over the nascent security institutions and managed to position themselves in their midst. In this regard, individuals from Souq al-Jouma, a neighbourhood where Salafists had a presence and enjoyed a good reputation before 2011, directly benefitted from the appointment of Souq al-Jouma native Hashem Bishr<sup>xxi</sup> to a leadership role in the Tripoli Supreme Security Committee (SSC).<sup>xxii</sup> Among this group was Abdulraouf Kara, who was from an important family in the neighbourhood.<sup>xxiii</sup> He had participated to some degree in the uprising in Tripoli, but was not among from the group of leading revolutionary figures that had fought in the Nafusa Mountains. Known for his piety, Kara took charge of the local ‘support branches’ of the Tripoli SCC.<sup>xxiv</sup>

When the SSC was dissolved at the end of 2012 as part of security sector reform efforts, some Salafis from Souq al-Jouma coalesced around one of the new groups set up in its place, the Rada Special Deterrence

Force (SDF). This force was directly supervised by the Ministry of Interior. Attempts were made to regularise the group, for example through requiring it to be led by regular military or police officers. However, the religious character of many of its members frustrated attempts to impose a more regular hierarchy: Kara remained an influential figure and would later become the commander of the group. The SDF's activities were broadly defined,<sup>xxv</sup> and it continued to privilege working at imposing order within society.

Thus, while both quietist and political Salafis were working with the nascent state institutions, they did so on very different levels.

## **2013-2015 – different modalities of violence, fitna versus order**

It became clear in 2013 that the new political institutions could not contain and organise competition for power between the major forces that had led the 2011 uprising. The work of the GNC, the transitional legislature elected in 2012, was completely stalled as a result of polarisation and conflict between two rival blocks, respectively dominated by Islamist groups and a “civil” coalition.<sup>xxvi</sup> Increasingly, non-institutional political avenues were relied upon to influence state decision-making. The various political-military coalitions that had gradually taken control of parts of the state institutions started to mobilise resources against their competitors. This, and the succession of events that took place in 2014, had important consequences for the Salafis that had taken different stances towards democratic party politics.

Political Salafis had initially benefitted from their engagement with state institutions to gain influence at the national level. However, their position was affected by developments in eastern Libya, and in Benghazi in particular, where retired general Khalifa Haftar launched a broad military campaign against Islamist groups in May 2014 (the “Dignity Campaign”). Moreover, the parliamentary elections for the new House of Representatives (HoR), organised in July 2014 with a view to overcoming the polarisation of the GNC resulted in an important defeat for the Islamist camp. This was threatening political Salafists' continued access to state power.

In response, key figures within the former LIFG joined forces with other primarily Islamist actors in military operation “Libya Dawn” during the summer of 2014. Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani, the head of Dar al-Ifta', Libya's new top religious institution, also strongly

intervened in the conflict in favour of the Islamist coalition.<sup>xxvii</sup> Although he exemplified a different religious trend to the former LIFG leaders, he in 2015 entered into an alliance with former LIFG ideologue Sami Saadi, who joined the Dar al-Ifta's research council.<sup>xxviii</sup>

While the Libya Dawn operation was presented as aiming to prevent a counter-revolution, it was clear in the rhetoric and subsequent decisions of the coalition that the use of violence was part of the struggle to maintain their privileged access and control over state institutions.<sup>xxix</sup> After taking control of Tripoli militarily, the coalition reconstituted the GNC elected in 2012 and its government to challenge the newly-elected HoR. This led to the duplication and division of Libya's institutions.

The choice of military struggle as a means to maintain control over state institutions did partly achieve its aim as the Islamist coalition was able to keep control of the capital and key assets within it. However, the operation impacted negatively on the legitimacy of "political" Salafis. Their involvement in Libya Dawn and the use they had made of state institutions (including religious) to prevail over political competitors had resulted in their being perceived by many Libyans as derailing the transition: dividing the country, causing insecurity and economic collapse.

Quietist Salafis, in contrast, did not play a prominent role in the Libya Dawn coalition. Maintaining their primary focus on the provision of order and security, they essentially continued to build their interaction with state institutions on the basis of specific services that they provided at the local level. At the same time they were gradually getting better organised and reinforcing their presence in the security structures without seeking high-level positions. They publicised their efforts in combatting smugglers of drugs and alcohol, and later fighting organised crime, kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and members of the Salafi-jihadi Islamic State organisation, through publishing photographs and videos of their operations on social media.<sup>xxx</sup> These were issues linked to their conception of morality and correct Islam, but also issues of popular concern to local residents in Tripoli and other major cities, which earned them a reputation in some quarters of morality and efficiency. This was especially the case in the general atmosphere of insecurity that followed the Libya Dawn operation.

Even though the attacks of quietist Salafis against other religious currents and their attempts to impose a particularly conservative moral vision raised concerns among various segments of society, two factors benefitted them. The first was that they did not openly attempt to seize control over the national religious institutions.<sup>xxxi</sup> The second factor was the lack of transparency regarding the relationship between quietist

preachers and the armed elements.<sup>xxxii</sup> Rather than presenting themselves as parties to the struggle for controlling the state, quietist Salafis continued to situate their targeted use of violence as a struggle for providing security and order to ordinary Libyans, and, increasingly, as supporting the consolidation of the state institutions based in Tripoli.

Quietist Salafis in eastern Libya pursued a slightly different strategy, in a context in which the struggle for order and the struggle to shape the state converged. A second centre of political power had emerged in the east in August 2014 after the establishment of the HoR in Tobruk and its nomination of a government. The HoR legitimated and supported Haftar's Operation Dignity, which had been set up following a spate of assassinations and increasing insecurity in Benghazi, imputed to the actions of Salafi jihadi groups such as Ansar Al-Sharia. As such, it had met with legitimacy and support in the eyes of certain constituencies in eastern Libya.

This beginning of a convergence of institutional politics, military power and popular legitimacy facilitated the participation of quietist Salafis in Haftar's military campaign. Because of their social work at the community level, they enjoyed a form of grassroots legitimacy that made them useful partners for Haftar, who needed to mobilise additional forces in support of his Libyan National Army (LNA). While exclusively Salafi fighting units were formed,<sup>xxxiii</sup> Salafi elements were also spread across the LNA's forces. Salafi figures like Ashraf al-Mayar, a revolutionary brigade commander in 2011, joined the elite "special forces" Saiqa Brigade. Salafi groups also fought with various neighbourhood "protection forces" or LNA "support forces" in Benghazi.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Armed quietist Salafis could frame their involvement with the LNA as supporting the *wali al-amr* and providing security demanded by residents. Their involvement was later backed up by a *fatwa* from Saudi Arabia.<sup>xxxv</sup>

The key role that quietist Salafis played in supporting Operation Dignity provided them with an opportunity to access resources and to become more organised. It also allowed them to directly confront their competitors in the religious field<sup>xxxvi</sup> and gain control over the new "national" religious institutions set up in the east to compete with the Tripoli-based Dar al-Ifta'.<sup>xxxvii</sup> By gaining positions within official institutions, quietist Salafis in eastern Libya thus acquired a degree of power in shaping policies. This was particularly the case in the field of piety and morality, where their influence started to become more visible.

The period between 2014 and 2016 was therefore important for quietist Salafis in both eastern and western Libya. They presented themselves as apolitical and emphasised those aspects of their activities

that aimed at maintaining or restoring order. In this way, they gradually reinforced their image as key partners for any political authority seeking to exert control on the ground. This was especially effective in the East, where power was being more centralised. As a result of this, quietist Salafis were much better placed than political Salafis to capitalise on the changing political context in Libya from 2016 onwards.

## 2016-2019 - not so “apolitical” Salafis

The political context from 2016 onwards enabled quietest Salafis to an even greater extent at the expense of other Salafis. However, as their influence has grown, the tensions between their “apolitical” ideology and their institutional strategy have begun to show.

Changes from late 2015 onwards worked in the favour of quietist Salafis as alliances were reconfigured around new power centres in western and eastern Libya. The UN-led efforts to mediate between Libya’s rival political blocs had ultimately reconfigured the rivalry around on the one hand, a coalition centred around a newly-created executive body, the Presidential Council of the Government of National Accord (PC-GNA) established in Tripoli, and on the other hand the HoR and the LNA dominant in the East.

The fact that the PC-GNA needed to come to some arrangement with local armed groups to take up residence in Tripoli in March 2016 resulted in a reconfiguring of the security landscape there. The quietist-Salafi-leaning SDF led by Abdulraouf Kara was one of a small number of groups that elected to back the PC-GNA. Over the following year, these groups gradually pushed their rivals out of the capital, including armed groups linked to former LIFG leaders.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Their affiliation with the PC meant that their actions, while contributing to a profound change in the political and security landscape of the city, could be framed as supporting the internationally-recognised government. They also served to expand the SDF’s access to state institutions.

Moreover, the SDF did not only rely on their affiliation to the PC-GNA, but continued to work on issues of popular concern, using their interventions to further build up links with the state administration. This went beyond the Ministry of Interior. Their work on organised crime helped them increase their links with the prosecutor general’s office in the Ministry of Justice, and they also intervened in issues related to banks and cash distribution, the issuing of passports or the logistics related to the *hajj* pilgrimage.<sup>xxxix</sup> However, despite the popularity of some of these moves, the perceived increasing political influence of the SDF has met some pushback, as it points to the limits of the quietist

Salafis' apolitical discourse. For example, a May 2018 decision by the PC-GNA to rename the SDF and give it broader power was widely criticised.<sup>xi</sup>

While the changes in eastern Libya during this period were less profound, the LNA consolidated its influence, in part at the expense of the HoR, and continued to enjoy the support of an important part of the population in the east. Quietist Salafi brigades remain important within the LNA's fighting force, and have continued to be used in major military operations. This was notably the case with the Tareq Ibn Ziyad Brigade, which was involved in the offensive in Derna (May 2018) and in the operations in the south-west in January-February 2019.<sup>xii</sup> However, similar to western Libya, there are indications that the influence of quietist Salafis on public policy is meeting with popular resistance. This could prove a limiting factor on their expansion. Controversial LNA decisions such as restrictions on women travelling without a male relative have already been reversed as a result of broad opposition within society.<sup>xiii</sup>

The fact that in both eastern and western Libya non-elected executive powers (the PC-GNA and the LNA) became more influential than their elected legislative counterparts has also contributed to highlighting the dissonance in the "apolitical" discourse. It is difficult to see the refusal of quietist Salafis to engage in traditional party politics as a refusal to engage in politics, given that they are perceived as close to (and having a level of influence over) key decision makers.

The different configurations of power and authority in the east and west have, however, represented different constraints and opportunities to quietist Salafis. The more centralised authority in eastern Libya has given Salafis' use of 'state' apparatus to implement social policy a potentially more widespread impact than in the west. This is because of the more limited influence of the PC-GNA. However, the strength of tribal structures in the east could also provide more powerful pushback than more fractured civil society in the west.

## **What future for Libya's quietist Salafis?**

The strategy of quietist Salafis in eastern and western Libya since 2011 has thus been characterised by a focus on the targeted use of violence to enforce order and a bottom-up approach to engagement with state institutions. This has been promoted through a discourse of obedience to the ruler and has enabled quietist Salafis to increase their military capacities and gain significant influence over power centres. However, their vision of 'order' has consistently had two facets: a security dimension, welcomed by communities beset by criminal activity and insecurity in the wake of the 2011 war; and, a moral/religious dimension, including both social work and the imposition of highly conservative and exclusionary religious norms. The attempts of quietist Salafis to use state institutions to impose these moral/religious norms have arguably highlighted the limits of their apolitical discourse.

However, perhaps the more significant point is that the strategies of quietist Salafis have enabled them to embed themselves in 'state' institutions at a lower level on both sides of the political divide. Thus, despite social pushback, whatever the political and military outcome in Libya, they are unlikely to face the same dilemma that the LIFG leaders faced in 2014 of either losing their access to state institutions or being perceived as divisive and politically partisan actors. Therefore, they will probably be much more difficult to sideline.

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<sup>ii</sup> Academic literature on Salafism has tended to analyse Salafism as comprised of three main trends: violent jihadi Salafis, political Salafis and quietists who reject political engagement. See, for example, Meijer, Roel (2014) 'Introduction' in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Oxford University Press (p. 8). Meijer later argues (p. 18) that these categories should be seen as a scale.

<sup>iii</sup> See, for example, Fitzgerald, Mary (2015) 'Finding Their Place: Libya's Islamists During and After the Revolution', in Cole, Peter and Brian McQuinn (eds) *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath*, pp. 178-9. For further information on the LIFG, see also Ashour, Omar (2011) 'Post-Jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements', in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 23:3, pp. 377-397.

<sup>iv</sup> This recantation was part of a regime-led programme that would enable their release from prison. See Ashour (2011). See also Musawi, Mohammed Ali (2009) 'A Selected Translation of the LIFG Recantation Document', Quilliam.

<sup>v</sup> This current became particularly influential in the eastern cities of Benghazi and Derna, as well as in some areas around the central region near Sirte, with some among the most radical elements choosing to focus their activities abroad by joining the American-led coalition in Iraq after 2003. See Fitzgerald (2015), pp. 188-90; Fitzgerald, Mary (2016) 'Jihadism and its Relationship with Youth Culture and Ideology: The Case of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya' in Narbone, Luigi, Agnès Favier and Virginie Collombier (eds) *Inside Wars: Local Dynamics of Conflicts in Syria and Libya*, European University Institute, p. 45; Collombier, Virginie (2018) 'Sirte's Tribes under the Islamic State: From Civil War to Global Jihadism' in Collombier, Virginie and Olivier Roy (eds) *Tribes and Global Jihadism*, Hurst & Company, pp. 154.

<sup>vi</sup> Essentially Saudi Sheikh al-Albani and some among those who were inspired by his *Ahl al-hadith* movement in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, especially Sheikh Rabi' al-Madkhali and Sheikh Muqbil al-Wad'i, respectively. See Lacroix (2014) 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism' in Meijer, Roel (ed) *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, Oxford University Press at pg. 68-78; Bonnefoy, Laurent (2014) 'How Transnational is Salafism in Yemen?', in *Global Salafism*, pp. 323-240.

<sup>vii</sup> Nevertheless, we refer throughout this brief to "quietist" Salafis as while some groups or individuals may be staunch followers of Rabi' al-Madkhali (or indeed other members of his family such as Mohammed al-Madkhali, who are not always in agreement), there is arguably a broader quietist movement which follows mainstream Saudi references.

<sup>viii</sup> The role of Gaddafi's son Saadi in promoting this strand of Salafism was also mentioned by several interviewees.

<sup>ix</sup> Telephone interview with a Libyan researcher and religious scholar, November 2018. According to a telephone interview with a reconciliation activist familiar with Islamist militancy in western Libya (January 2017), two figures from the Libyan Amazigh community played a key role in Gaddafi's strategy of "nationalisation" of the quietist Salafi school: Abu Musab Majdi Haffalah from Yefren and Mohammed Abu Sawa from Nalut.

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sriMveeY9vA>. See also McGregor, Andrew (2017) 'Radical Loyalty and the Libyan Crisis : A Profile of Salafist Shaykh Rabi' bin Hadi al-Madkhali', <https://www.aberfoylesecurity.com/?p=3840>, and Wehrey, Frederic (2016) 'Quiet no More ? "Madkhali" Salafists in Libya are active in the battle against the Islamic State, and in factional conflicts ', <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/64846>.

<sup>xi</sup> Telephone interview with reconciliation activist, December 2018.



<sup>xii</sup> Telephone interviews with a Libyan reconciliation activist (December 2018, February 2019). While some researchers have referred to Bishr's 'Salafist' or 'Islamist' background (see, for example, Lacher and Cole (2014), 'Politics by Other Means. Conflicting Interests in Libya's Security Sector', Small Arms Survey, October, p. 33, and Wehrey, Frederic (2013) 'Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security,' Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 11, the activist stated that Bishr was a charismatic individual who reinforced his revolutionary credentials more than his religious background. On Bishr foregrounding his revolutionary credentials, see : <https://www.facebook.com/QwtAlradaAlhaast/photos/الرجل-هدا في-يشكك-من-لكل-الأدلة-التي-ألاحقت-9-مر-قم-الدليل-الشر-ف-قائمة-الوطني-629127377107223/>. In the post he denies being part of the '*ilzim baytak*' group, that is Salafis that followed fatwas to stay home and did not join the armed uprising.

<sup>xiii</sup> See, for example, Fitzgerald (2015), pp. 197-8.

<sup>xiv</sup> Sharif would later be appointed deputy defence minister.

<sup>xv</sup> Lacher and Cole (2014), pp. 22, 30, 56-7, 75; Cole, Peter and Umar Khan (2015), 'The Fall of Tripoli. Part 2', in Cole, Peter and Brian McQuinn, *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath*, Hurst and Company, pp. 89-104.

<sup>xvi</sup> Lacher, Wolfram (2013) 'Fault lines of the revolution: political actors, camps and conflicts in the new Libya', SWP Research Paper, 4/2013, p. 12.

<sup>xvii</sup> Fitzgerald (2016), pp. 45-8. Despite this, Ansar al-Sharia did not disrupt the 2012 General National Congress (GNC) elections. The group's social work included anti-drugs campaigns, medical and educational facilities and food distribution.

<sup>xviii</sup> For example Abu Musab Majdi Haffalah, whose sermons warn against the dangers of democracy.

<sup>xix</sup> Lacher and Cole (2014), p. 33.

<sup>xx</sup> Telephone interview with reconciliation activist, November 2018; telephone interview with a former (post-2011) Libyan ministry of interior employee, November 2018. A Libyan religious scholar referred to quietist Salafis undertaking similar work in eastern Libya (telephone interview with author, November 2018), as did an activist that frequently travels to Eastern Libya (telephone interview, March 2019). For an example of an anti-drugs campaign, see <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/QwtAlradaAlhaast/photos/a.521243294562299/523291001024195/?type=3&tn=-R>. On the destruction of Sufi shrines, see, for example: Lacher (2013), p. 16, Fitzgerald (2015), p. 187.

<sup>xxi</sup> On Bishr's links to Souq al-Jouma, see <https://www.facebook.com/QwtAlradaAlhaast/photos/الوطني-الرجل-هدا في-يشكك-من-لكل-الأدلة-التي-ألاحقت-9-مر-قم-الدليل-الشر-ف-قائمة-629127377107223/>.

<sup>xxii</sup> The reconciliation activist in a December 2018 telephone interview noted that the SCC played an important role in arming Tripoli's neighbourhoods such as Souq al-Jouma.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The social composition of Souq al-Jouma is primarily extended family units (*'a'lat*), among which several families including Kara's are known for their size and prominence.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Lacher and Cole (2014), p. 33. The former Ministry of Interior employee noted that figures like Bishr and Kara benefitted from being able to work in the social environment of Tripoli's residential neighbourhoods. He further noted that during this period, religious figures gained social capital through their involvement in dispute resolution, with some becoming important figures in armed groups.

<sup>xxv</sup> [https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/554-Decree%20No.%20%28308%29%20of%202013\\_ORG.pdf](https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/554-Decree%20No.%20%28308%29%20of%202013_ORG.pdf).

<sup>xxvi</sup> The "civil" (*madani*) current was concentrated around the National Forces Alliance political bloc, and privileged a view of the state which, while not secular, was distrustful of political Islam embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood and was more conciliatory towards individuals that had had some involvement in the Gaddafi regime. The Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party played a key role in

the Islamist alliance, which also brought together some political Salafis and those from the revolutionary camp that took a more hard-line stance towards those involved in the Gaddafi regime.

<sup>xxvii</sup> After the Libya Dawn operation, Dar al-Ifta' exerted direct influence on the government nominated by the restored GNC (the so-called Salvation government).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Dar al-Ifta' was re-established in 2011 by decision of the National Transitional Council, after having been dissolved by Gaddafi in the 1980s.

<sup>xxix</sup> See for instance Wehrey (2014).

<sup>xxx</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/QwtAlradaAlhaast>.

<sup>xxxi</sup> More than a deliberate strategy, this was also the consequence of the lack of well-educated religious leaders enjoying sufficient authority among the quietist Salafi current. Telephone interview with a Libyan researcher and religious scholar, November 2018; telephone interview with reconciliation activist, November 2018.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Although a Libyan researcher and religious scholar interviewed in Tunis in November 2018 gave an example of the way in which a religious hierarchy linked to preachers in mosques seemed to prevail over the more formal organisational authority, the majority of observers interviewed could not provide precise information on the links between religious and military figures.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Such as the Tawhid Battalion.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Wehrey (2016).

<sup>xxxv</sup> Telephone interview with religious scholar, November 2018. See also, Ali, Ahmed Salah, 'Libya's Warring Parties Play a Dangerous Game Working with Madkhali Salafists', Atlantic Council,

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/libya-s-warring-parties-play-a-dangerous-game-working-with-madkhali-salafists>.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Both jihadis and Sufis.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The HoR shortly after convening gave a direction to dissolve the Tripoli Dar al-Ifta', and subsequently founded its own competing institutions. Interviewees confirmed that these are controlled by quietist Salafis. The religious scholar interviewed by telephone in November 2018 noted that quietist Salafis had also been exerting influence over religious institutions at the local level, pointing to the death of a member of the local Fatwa council in Al-Marj in 2014, a figure close to the Muslim Brotherhood (see <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/20540>).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Lacher, Wolfram and Alaa al-Idrissi (2018), 'Capital of Militias: Tripoli's Armed Groups Capture the Libyan State', Small Arms Survey Briefing Paper, June, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Tripoli-armed-groups.pdf>.

<sup>xxxix</sup> The former Ministry of Interior employee noted that the SDF was responsible for providing protection to the staff of the Central Bank of Libya (telephone interview, November 2018). Observations from the SDF's Facebook page indicate growing links with the Prosecutor General's office, which were confirmed by the reconciliation activist. The reconciliation activist also mentioned the role of the SDF in solving some problems in relation to the issuing of passports (telephone interview, November 2018), while the religious scholar referred to their role in dealing with problems related to an executive decision not to allow elderly people to take a companion on the annual pilgrimage (interview, Tunis, November 2018).

<sup>xl</sup> See, for example, Reporters Without Borders, 'Decree gives blank cheque to Libyan militiamen who persecute journalists', 15 May 2018 (<https://rsf.org/en/news/decree-gives-blank-cheque-libyan-militiamen-who-persecute-journalists>).

<sup>xli</sup> Mace, Celian, 'Libye: le maréchal Haftar jette ses forces dans la bataille de Derna', Libération, 7 June 2018. ([https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/06/07/libye-le-marechal-haftar-jette-ses-forces-dans-la-bataille-de-derna\\_1657149](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/06/07/libye-le-marechal-haftar-jette-ses-forces-dans-la-bataille-de-derna_1657149)); Maghreb Confidential, 'How Khalifa Haftar got his hands on Sebha', 31 January 2019.

<sup>xlii</sup> See, for example, BBC News, 'Libya's eastern authority freezes women's travel ban', 22 February 2017 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39053829>).





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HYRES is funded by the Norwegian Research Council. For further information about HYRES see [https://www.nupi.no/nupi\\_eng/About-NUPI/Projects-centres-and-programmes/Hybrid-paths-to-resistance-in-the-Muslim-world-Iraq-Lebanon-Libya-and-Mali](https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/About-NUPI/Projects-centres-and-programmes/Hybrid-paths-to-resistance-in-the-Muslim-world-Iraq-Lebanon-Libya-and-Mali).

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