Islamist Movements in Libya: Chances and Challenges of Political Power

Libyan society is composed of several tribes co-existing with each other. Since the royal era the tribal community structures protected the values of conservative Islam against the attempts of different Islamist movements to penetrate Libyan society.

Like many other religious movements since the 1980s, the different Islamist organizations in Libya went through phases of endorsing and rejecting violence. While some of them try to be influential through political participation, other, more extremist, movements believe in the use of violence to bring about radical political and social change.

After the overthrow of Kaddafi’s regime, Islamist movements resurfaced again in Libya. Several factors such as the spread of weapons, the disintegration of the military institutions or the weakness of the state explain the spread of Islamist movements after the 2011 revolution.

There is no relationship between moderate movements and militant ones. There are very deep ideological, intellectual and political differences, although they may unite if necessary to fight a common enemy. The lack of a unified leadership and general public support make it difficult for them to be able to govern a state.

Moderate Islamist movements need to be involved in finding a political solution. The promotion of civil society organizations, reforming the educational system and a fairer distribution of oil revenues are among the key recommendations in order to stop the spread of extremist ideas and to find a sustainable peace.
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Introduction and Key Questions

This study has been commissioned by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation’s Libya office in order to provide an overview of Islamist movements in Libya after the overthrow of Muammar Kaddafi’s regime in 2011. The purpose of the study is to provide more detail on their identity, as well as their ideological and intellectual points of reference, and look at their political and social objectives. It also analyses their chances of political success within the wider political landscape in Libya. The study also looks into the fundamental factors that have fueled the spread of extremist militant movements since 2011.

Key Questions
This study aims to answer five key questions:

1. Which Islamist movements exist in Libya, and what was the nature of their political presence and activity before February 2011?
2. What are the main factors that contributed to the return of these Islamist movements and the emergence of armed groups?
3. What kind of armed movements exist in Libya and what are their goals and positions towards the state? Do they all adopt the same ideological references, visions and goals?
4. How did the transitional government deal with the armed movements and why did it not confront them?
5. What chances do these Islamist movements have to extend their political power and control over public affairs in Libya?

In order to answer these questions, we will provide in the first chapter of this study an overview of the structure of Libyan society, which lived through a long period of isolation. We will examine the importance of tribes, as well as dominant religious and social values.

The second part will examine the origins, ideologies as well as the political activity of Islamist movements in Libya before 2011 and the chances they had at participating in the political process.

The third part will focus on the rise of Islamist movements after the fall of the Kaddafi regime in 2011. The chapter will look at the way Islamist movements and groups participated in the political process as well as their performance in government. It will also provide an overview of both moderate as well as extremist Islamist militias and groups operating outside the political framework.

The conclusion will examine the likelihood and challenges of establishing a religious state led by Islamist movements in Libya.

Finally, we will give recommendations that could be used to help with the political impasse and the deteriorating security situation in Libya and the possibility of including moderate Islamist movements in the political process.

1. The structure of Libyan society

After the 2011 uprising and the subsequent collapse of the political regime, and in the absence of state institutions, it was the tribal structure of Libyan society that prevented the country from social disintegration. Among the Libyan tribes, values such as solidarity, religious moderation and tolerance as well as a rejection of discrimination and extremism have been dominant, and have helped to prevent the disintegration of society.

Libyan society is composed of several tribes co-existing with each. Deeply held values such as solidarity are rooted in Libya’s Arab and Amazigh heritage.

With around one million people, Warfalla is considered to be one of the largest Libyan tribes in numeric terms. Members of the Warfalla tribe live everywhere in Libya, but particularly in the West. The Qadhadhfa tribe is based in Sabha in central Libya, while members of the Al Megara tribe live in the region of Wadi al Shatii. The “Awlad Slayman” tribe is located in Fezzan in eastern Libya, particularly around Al Marej, and Al Beidha. The East of the country is the home of the “Al-Abided”, “Al Awaguir” and “Al-Baraassa” tribes.

The majority of tribes are concentrated in one geographic location, but members from all tribes can be found in different cities across the country. The city of Benghazi for example, is considered as a mixed city with many different tribe members.
The majority of these Libyan tribes are characterized by a strong sense of loyalty and support for members of their own tribe. Muammar Kaddafi’s regime tried frequently to exploit these tribal structures in its favor by pursuing a policy of manipulation in order to tighten its grip on the state. The previous regime used to strengthen a tribe at the expense of another group, aimed at increasing its control over a community.

However due to its complex nature, the Kaddafi regime failed to fully divide the Libyan tribes for the purposes of regime survival. The 2011 uprising demonstrated that the Libyan tribes represent “a coherent societal entity” tied together by strong kinship and marriage alliances, which proved capable of toppling the rule of Kaddafi.

The values of moderation, tolerance and the rejection of various forms of extremism are the characteristics of society in Libya, where 95% of the population follow the Maliki Ash’ari doctrine, which is focused on the moderate and tolerant values of Islam.

Religion has played an important role in disseminating moderate Islamic values within Libyan society for decades. The Senussi movement, a reformist religious movement that originated in the 19th century, is an example of the depth of Islamic moderation. Since the royal era the tribal community structures protected the values of conservative Islam against the attempts of different Islamist movements to penetrate Libyan society.

The political isolation of Libyan society for 42 years also resulted in the religious, intellectual and organizational absence of the kind of Islamist movements that had been active in the Middle East and North Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. The tribal and religious values in Libya, meant that society did not favor integrating movements that represent religious extremism and fanaticism.

2. Islamist movements: Origins and political activity before 2011

Contemporary Islamist movements and parties are based on the belief that Islam is the solution of political, social, economic and cultural conditions. Despite the convergence of these groups around an Islamist ideology, they deeply differ among themselves in vision and method. These Islamist movements have deep differences on many issues, some of which relate to jurisprudence others to their political priorities. Those differences have led researchers to describe them by several designations including “political Islam”, “Islamist fundamentalism”, “Islamist awakening”, “Islamist movements” and Islamist currents.

More precisely, Islamist movements are defined as “a group of organizations that adopt Islam as an ideological reference for its political activity and pursue the Islamization of the State and Society through the establishment of a theocratic state based upon Islam law “Sharia” as the main source of legislation and by establishing a society regulated by the teachings and values of Islam.”

This study adopts the concept of “Islamist movements” as a label for those movements that originated in Libya.

2.1 The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood is a contemporary Islamist movement that advocates the return to Islam and application of Islamic Sharia in real life. It opposes the separation of state and religion as promoted by secularist movements in the Arab region and the Islamic world. Since the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood, the movements have tried to forge transnational alliances in order to become a global movement that ensures its sustainability through the multiplicity of its centers.

The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya goes back to the years 1963-1964. The organization was established as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which was founded by Hassan al-Banna in 1929.

The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya is due to two factors. First, there was a direct impact of a number of Egyptian teachers supportive of the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were teaching at secondary schools and at university. Others
were teaching at educational institutions belonging to the Senussi movement in Jaghboob or in the city of Al Bayda, which enabled them to recruit young people and influence their religious and intellectual beliefs. Secondly, a number of Libyan students were influenced by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood while studying in Egypt. Upon their return to Libya some of them pursued the establishment of a Libyan branch affiliated to Hassan al-Banna’s organization. People who played a role in the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya were Abdellatif Alchuiref, Ali Shouiter, Mohamed Albeshti, Mahmoud Hetki, Omar Nami, Mohamed Houissa, Ibrahim Ghouil and Fateh Hawas.

The doctrine of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya was reliant upon three main pillars:
- A belief and commitment to the spiritual leadership of Hassan al-Banna.
- The adoption of the same regulatory and institutional structure established by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.
- The goal of establishing Islamist Sharia within Libyan society through preaching. The purpose was to reform public life on all levels: politically, socially, culturally and economically.

In order to achieve its objectives, in the first stage the organization seeks to rebuild the personality of the individual, the family and the community by including Islam in all areas of life. After the appropriate ideological background has been prepared, the aim is to rebuild an Islamist State during a second phase. The organization adopted the slogan: “Allah is our objective and the Prophet is our model, the Quran is our constitution, Jihad is our way and Death for the sake of Allah is our maximum ambition.”

The first branch of the Muslim Brotherhood emerged in Libya in 1967 in the two major cities of Benghazi and Tripoli. The movement lacked a clear vision and process to achieve their reformist goals. They were not able to manage state institutions and run public affairs. Thus, they confined their activities to fighting corruption and the opposition to the presence of foreign military bases in the country.

However, two years after its creation in Libya, the movement was stopped when Muammar Kaddafi seized power in 1969. In 1972 Kaddafi issued a bill that criminalized the movement; according to the law joining any political party or organization became a crime punishable by death.

The Muslim Brotherhood was immediately paralyzed when Kaddafi launched the Cultural Revolution in 1973. A group of intellectuals, students and trade union activists were arrested and imprisoned including some members of the Muslim Brotherhood, even though at the time the movement did not have any real political clout or popular basis. Kaddafi banned the Muslim Brotherhood from holding any kind of activity, persecuted its members, and confiscated their documents. With the cultural revolution in 1973 the organization was dismantled and its activities paralyzed.

However, at the beginning of the 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged again at the initiative of young Libyans who came back from abroad. They tried to rebuild an underground organization, as it was impossible to carry out any public activity then. But, the return of the Muslim Brotherhood did not last for very long as the secret organization was discovered in 1989 and dismantled. 150 members were arrested, the general supervisor and his deputy were sentenced to death. Kaddafi’s son, Saif al-Islam’s position towards the Muslim Brotherhood was different. In 2005, Saif Al Islam released a number of political prisoners, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the main conditions that were imposed in return was that they would not engage in any organizational or political activity.

The intellectual pillars of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya are based upon:
- Islam is an integrated and comprehensive system for all areas of life, including the political one, which is the only way to reform society and establish an Islamist state where Sharia is applied.
- Prepare a religious, social and cultural environment conducive to the dissemination of its ideology in Libya.
- A strong ideological support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.
- Opposition against Western dominance and the embargo on Libya.

- Fight against moral and social corruption

- Commitment to the obligation of Jihad.

The Muslim Brotherhood has been able to recover after the Libyan revolution in 2011. They have focused on securing access to public institutions and its political, security and military entities. They publicized their activities on 17 February 2011 when they held their first Congress in Benghazi. Which political role they play now, will be discussed later.

2.2 The National Front for the Salvation of Libya

The National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) is separatist branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Its creation was announced in 1981. The Salvation Front supported the use of violence as a tool to change the political regime in Libya which led to armed confrontations with the former regime, especially after the movement launched an armed attack on the Al-Azizia barracks in 1984.

The Salvation Front’s political discourse was based on the fact that, “the regime in Libya practices terrorism, spreads chaos, turmoil, political corruption, and is wasting the wealth of Libya on failed projects. Wars, failure, confusion and chaos are provoked by the Kaddafi regime, and Libya is governed by gangs loyal to the regime. The NFSL seeks to topple the regime in Libya with the use of violence, and the establishment of a national, democratic and constitutional system, inspired by the Islamist doctrine of the Libyan people, its history and cultural heritage. The regime should rest upon the ‘Country’s Standing Constitution’, where the most important provision should focus upon the separation of the legislative, judicial and executive powers.”

Among the most prominent members of the Front are its Secretary General, Mohammad Yusuf Lemegrif, who resigned in 1982 to be replaced by Ibrahim Abdelaziz Sahed, and Ramadan Abu Zakuk.

After the 2011 revolution, the NFSL decided to participate and enter the political process. They secured key positions in Libya after gaining seats in the first elected parliament - the National General Congress (GNC). Mohammad Lemegrif chaired the National General Congress for a period and then resigned, Ramadan Abu Zakuk, was a member of the National Congress representing the constituency of Benghazi.

2.3 Hizb ut-Tahrir

The Hizb ut-Tahrir party emerged in 1970 as a separate branch of the Muslim Brotherhood after making some ideological and intellectual revisions. Its members faced repression during the period between 1973 and 1978. Hizb ut-Tahrir suffered also from various kinds of oppression and persecution like the Muslim Brotherhood, which forced a number of its leaders into exile. It does not play an influential role, it should however be mentioned.

2.4 Militant Islamist movements

The prosecution of any activity by a political party and the oppression of any dissenting voice to Kaddafi’s regime led to a political vacuum in Libya and pushed dozens of young Libyans to join Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 1979, where unlike the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizb ut-Tahrir, new Islamist movements, who supported the use of violence, were established. Among them were:

- The Islamist Jihad organization which was active between 1980 and 1990 and committed acts of violence before being dismantled by the Kaddafi regime
- The Mujahedeen organization, which was mainly composed of Libyans returning from Afghanistan. Their number was estimated at about 400 armed militants who fed Al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Sharia and most recently the Islamic State (Daesh), which extended its control over several strategic areas in Libya, including the city of Sirte and its airport.
- The Martyrs of Libya; it consists mainly of young people influenced by Wahhabi ideology. It is considered as an extension of the Libyan Afghans
who returned from Afghanistan

- The Libyan Constitutional Union, which is led by Mohamed Bin Ghalboun and Mohamed Nakua. It does not enjoy any wide popular support. It has a small number of Libyan activists. It is an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, but it is not inclined to violence.

- The Libyan Islamist Fighting Movement: this movement can be considered a branch of al-Qaeda. The movement's leader is Abdel hakim Belched who was one of al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan.

What these extremist movements have in common is that they believe in the use of violence to bring about radical political and social change. The majority of these movements do not believe in the civil state, its institutions or its organs. They seek to establish an Islamist state in accordance with an extremist religious vision.

Like many other religious movements since the 1980s, the different Islamist organizations in Libya went through phases of endorsing and rejecting violence. Kaddafi’s regime (1969-2011) confronted the extremist Islamist movements with violence including assassinations. It opposed all organizations of radical Islam, as it saw them as a threat to the security of the state and society. Still, Islam remained the state’s religion in Libya and it still has a powerful impact on the political and social sphere.

Libyan religious practices were closely monitored by the regime, in order to avoid any political interference in religion. The surveillance of mosques and a culture of self-censorship ensured that the clergy and their followers remained within the limits of state-sanctioned religious practices to an extent that some mosques complied with the government’s vision of Islam.

The activities of Islamist movements were stifled to such an extent that any political and social activity as well as charitable work became impossible. That’s why these movements focused their objectives on securing support and assistance from Arab and Western countries as well as the overthrow of Kaddafi’s regime.

3. Islamist Movements after the 2011 uprising

3.1 Factors that contributed to the rise of Islamist movements

The country has been witnessing violent conflicts and dispute since the fall of the regime. Following the uprising that began in February 2011, Islamist movements that had been persecuted by Kaddafi returned to join the popular uprising and fight against the regime.

There are several factors that contributed to the spread of Islamist movements:

Firstly weapons proliferated across the country, which contributed to arming revolutionary groups aligned with Islamist movements. A report by the International Crisis Group estimates that more than 125000 people in Libya are carrying weapons.

The spread of weapons led to a militarization of the Libyan tribes who started competing for as many weapons as possible, in order to defend themselves and their interests and to avoid being marginalized during the political discussions that began on how to share resources and power.

Secondly, the disintegration of the military institutions during the revolution, remains the most serious challenge facing the country. Tribal violence and the use of weapons were fueled by the descent into lawlessness in Libya. Both the National Transitional Council as well as the transitional government failed to integrate the armed militias into public institutions. Thus, many armed movements refused to give up their arms. What is more serious is that those militias believed that the use of weapons was a “revolutionary legitimacy” they had obtained in return for participating in the overthrow of the regime.

Furthermore, there is a number of countries interfered directly in Libyan domestic affairs through their support for Islamists. There are suspicions that The Muslim Brotherhood was supplied with various types...
Another important factor was the poor performance of the governments that came to power after the collapse of Kaddafi’s regime, starting with the Transitional Council and later the National General Congress. The Muslim Brotherhood exploited that weakness and intervened in the provisional draft constitutional declaration. They also interfered in the election law to allocate more seats for political parties. They played a major role in the drafting of the law on political parties in order to make it easier to create religious, regional and tribal parties, even though the law prohibits the creation of parties on a religious basis.

The government’s weak performance and the spread of financial corruption, and social, political and security tensions went hand in hand with a society eager for freedom and whose youth was looking for a better life. This situation pushed a large number of young people towards armed militias in order to earn money and influence within these movements that enjoyed financial support from the National Congress as well as the government that was looking to increase its influence.

Due to the weakness of the state, the borders went uncontrolled and large numbers of extremist Islamists were able to enter the country and join armed militias. Their presence all over the country contributed to significantly increasing the number and strength of these militias.

Furthermore, democratic culture was lacking among political actors and within society after the 2011 revolution. Since independence in December 1951, the Libyan people have not had the opportunity to engage in a democratic experience that establishes a political culture, which believes in the right to difference, the freedom of expression and political and social dialogue that will guarantee civil peace. Libyans had never enjoyed a democratic process and freedom of opinion, or lived in a system with respect for human rights. Libyan intellectuals and political elites did not experience good governance, or functioning state institutions. Institutions based upon the rule of law and a sense of loyalty towards the state were nonexistent. Hence, the new political class struggled to formulate a clear political vision on the management of the country’s affairs or the practice of democracy.

Hence, Libyan society seemed closed and dominated by traditional cultural values that did not correspond to the political aspirations, and the establishment of a civil democratic state. Kaddafi’s political legacy of exclusion and marginalization remained dominant both among politicians as well as the public. This led to the deepening of differences and fueled conflicts within the National General Congress, especially between the “Justice and Construction bloc, which represented the Islamist movement and the Alliance of National Forces, a liberal group. This explains the failure to reach an agreement on the nature of the state and its institutions.

The social and political map of Libya was drawn in the 1950s that led to the formation of the confederation of the three regions (Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripoli). External and foreign forces had participated in the building up of a new Libya based on their own interests.

Generally, the return of Islamist movements to Libya after the fall of Kaddafi’s regime and their attempts to exploit the newly available freedom, helped them implement their visions and ideas, and tightened their control over the different regions. It also led to the proliferation of armed movements in Libya, and to the emergence of other movements with an ideological background alien to Libyan society trying to extend their influence by force.

After the overthrow of Kaddafi’s regime, Islamist movements resurfaced again in Libya. They emerged this time in two ways: one group was operating within the political system and complying with laws, and the other group was armed and operating outside the established order.
3.2 Islamist movements operating within the political system of parliament and government

The process of democratic transition began in the fall of 2011. Many politicians predicted then that the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood might win an overwhelming majority in parliamentary elections, as it was the case in Tunisia and Egypt.

In March 2012 the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood founded a political party named “Justice and Construction Party”, chaired by Mohamed Sawan. The party was inspired by the “Party for Freedom and Justice” in Egypt the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood there.

In the 2012 parliamentary election the party won about 17 seats out of a total of 80 and became the second largest electoral force, after the “Coalition of National Forces” secured 39 seats.

The «Libyan Islamist Fighting Group», an anti-Gaddafi guerrilla group aiming to overthrow Colonel Gaddafi from 1994 onwards crashed in 1998 split into two political groups to compete in these elections. The “Al Watan Party”, a moderate group with a broad basis, which was joined by Abdelhakim Belhadj a former the founder of the Libyan Islamist Fighting Group and former head of Tripoli Military Council on the one hand and the “Al Umma Wasat Party”, a more conservative party with an extremist ideological background that was joined by the most radical members of «Al Jamaa Al Muqatila: the Fighting Group» led by Sami al-Saadi on the other hand. However, the “Al Watan Party”, did not win any seats in the elections, while “Al Umma Wasat Party”, won one seat, which was allocated to Abdelwahab Kaid, the brother of the late Abu Yahya al-Libi, the deputy leader of al-Qaeda in the MAGHREB who was killed in 2012. The «Libyan Islamist Fighting Group» maintained its ideological background and its political objectives and refrained from jihadist activities, as it changed its name to become “The Libyan Islamist Movement for Change.”

The Muslim Brotherhood benefited greatly from its activities within the parliament and in the new coalition government. The Justice and Construction Party held five ministerial portfolios in government: Gas, Oil, Housing, Youth and Sports, Economy and Electricity in addition to the post of Deputy Prime Minister. The movement obstructed the activities of the Zidane government in the GNC and blocked projects that did not serve its interests.

This situation increased the tension between the Muslim Brotherhood and Prime Minister Ali Zidane. The movement threatened Zidane with a vote of no confidence against his government, especially after he had recognized the June 2014 revolution in Egypt, which was against the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Prime Minister said in an interview on Sky News on November 24, 2013 that the Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters had decided to overthrow his government. He stressed that there were those who would try to profit from the popular movement to achieve their own interests. He stressed that his government would not withdraw its decision to disarm all Libyans. This was one of the most important sources of tension between him and the Muslim Brotherhood. He was determined to dissolve armed militias, disarm them and prevent funds from reaching them in order to avoid the creation of a separate military force.

The Muslim Brotherhood manipulated the security services and tried to control them by establishing a body called the Supreme Provisional Security Committee, which is a parallel police committee, aligned with the Ministry of Interior. This parallel police force tried to weaken the army and the police, to monopolize and withhold funds, in addition to providing financial support to Islamist movements and strengthening their positions. The budgets allocated to the ministries of Defense and Interior were transferred to this committee. Prime Minister Zidane was not able to dissolve the committee. The Muslim Brotherhood continued to harass Zidane and pushed him to resign and flee to Germany. He said in his statements after fleeing the country that the Muslim Brotherhood was the main reason why his government's work was slow and its achievements modest. They were also behind the failure to collect arms and dissolve the militias.
In addition to that to other bodies were designed to strengthen the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood: Dar Al Fatwa was established by a decree of the Transitional Council in 2012, and was allocated a budget, as well as the League of Libyan Theologians. These two bodies worked to issue several fatwas and decisions, which justify the establishment of an Islamist state. Among the fatwas of Sheikh Sadiq Gharyani, the Grand Mufti was one fatwa that prohibited voting for liberal parties during the elections of the GNC. Another decree was issued by Dar Fatwa stating it was an obligation to fight the forces of the Libyan army under Major General Khalifa Haftar (Al Karama operation). It also stated that Haftar should be considered a despot, and that those victims who died as a result of fighting Karama would become martyrs.

The Mufti Sadiq Gharyani is considered to be a spiritual guide of the extremist organization Ansar al-Sharia. He has repeatedly cleared it of all guilt of committing terrorist acts. This caused anger among Libyans and led to calls for his dismissal from office. He was accused of politicizing religion and of adapting his lessons and his sermons to serve a political ideology that does not serve national unity and threatens the cohesion of the social fabric.

The outgoing GNC, and these two structures contributed as a result of the domination of the Muslim Brotherhood and extremists to the deterioration of the situation, and a descent into chaos. Islamist armed militias grew increasingly powerful and took advantage of the government's financial support. The lack of accountability increased popular discontent and indignation towards the deteriorating situation in the country, especially after numerous assassinations of civilians, army and police officers, judges, political and social activists and all those who disagree with Islamists or accuse them of being behind the crisis in Libya.

The Muslim Brotherhood was punished through the ballot box, as they did not win the parliamentary elections in 2014 that ended the mandate of the GNC. The election results were a direct result of the political failure of the Muslim Brotherhood. But the movement refused to accept the election results and the legitimacy of the newly established parliament that had to move to Tobruk, in the East of Libya. Currently, the Muslim Brotherhood is colluding with extremist movements and has formed an alliance against the Al Karama operation, as they consider Major General Khalifa Haftar’s military operation a coup.

3.3 Islamist militias and groups outside the political framework and their position towards state and society

After the fall of the Kaddafi regime and the subsequent release of thousands of political prisoners, many armed movements were formed. Their background is varied, some have an ethnic origin such as Tare, and others a tribal background for example the militia from Zintan, and others are religiously motivated. For the purpose of this study we will focus on religiously motivated militias, which can be divided into militias with moderate Islamist tendencies and brigades with extremist Islamist tendencies.

3.3.1 Militias with moderate Islamist tendencies

- The martyrs of 17th of February militia

This is the largest armed militia in eastern Libya in terms of equipment and weaponry. It receives funds from the Libyan Ministry of Defense in Tripoli. This militia is considered to be a part of the Tripoli government who pays its wages. It has a large arsenal of light and heavy weapons, as well as training camps. The number of its fighters is estimated to be between 1,500 and 3,500 fighters.

The battalion carried out many security tasks and contributed to the establishment of order in the east of Libya and in the city of Kufra in the south. Its Emir is Fawzi Abu Ketef, a 50-year-old man who holds a Master's degree in computer sciences from the United States. He spent 18 years in prison during the Kaddafi years. The militia is now engaged in open war with the armed forces of General Haftar in Benghazi. It is deployed in the eastern region. It bears a jihadist ideology quite close to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, but it does not accuse the
community of apostasy and it believes in the state. It featured very prominently during the elections on July 7th 2012, when the parliament of Tripoli was elected.

- The Militia of Martyr Raf Allah Alsahati

This militia is named after one of the first Libyan martyrs who died fighting the forces of Kaddafi’s regime in March 2011 in Benghazi.

The militia began its activity within the Brigade of the Martyrs of 17 February before it expanded to become an independent armed militia. The number of its members is estimated at 1,000 fighters deployed in the east of Libya, especially in the cities of Benghazi, Tobruk, Derna, and Al Bayda. It has a jihadist Salafist ideology. However, it looks relatively moderate as it does not accuse the community of apostasy and believes in the State and its institutions. It participated in securing the national elections and other operations with the Ministry of Defense in Eastern Libya. The militia condemned the assassination of the American Ambassador to Libya in Benghazi. It is one of the powerful militias led by Ismaïl Salaby the brother of the preacher and historian Aly Salaby, member of the International Union of Muslim Theologians who is a living in Qatar. The militia is considered to be supportive of the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

- The Forces of Fajr Libya

This militia is an alliance of militias coming mainly from the region of Misrata, Gharyan and Sabratha as well as from the militia of Central Libya Shield. This coalition is working under the supervision of a joint operation room in Tripoli, called “The Movement of Fajr Libya”.

A number of these militias’ fighters took part in the revolution. They dominate the city of Tripoli and are accused of being the main armed wing of the GNC. It was behind the kidnapping of former Prime Minister Ali Zidane. The General National Congress transferred the Central Libya Shield to Tripoli at the end of 2012, to enhance security after tension and fears that a group of ex-regime loyalists would join tribes hostile to Islamists in order to bring down the government had increased.

Fajr Libya explained in a statement broadcast on a number of satellite channels that the liberation of facilities and institutions in Tripoli was conducted by honest February 14th rebels who destroyed a regime of injustice and tyranny, that had supported global terrorism and threatened international peace and security.

It denounced terrorism and extremism, and stressed that it did not belong to any extremist organization. Fajr Libya confirmed in a statement its full respect for the constitution and the peaceful alternation of power. It speaks of the need to recognize parliamentary authority, its respect for constitutional legitimacy and the requirements of democracy, and that there was no legitimacy for those who did not adhere to constitutional legitimacy. The statement added: “We emphasize that the militias of the Chiefs of Staff and those of the rebels are not biased to any regional, tribal, partisan or ideological agendas and that the homeland is for all. There can be no discriminating against children of the same country. Loyalty should be to God then to the Homeland”. The statement called for justice for the oppressed and anyone deprived of their national rights such as the Amazigh, the Tebbou and the Touareg, who should not be excluded and treated with dignity and respect. “The state must extend its hand to all those who would like to help rebuild Libya according to the principles of democracy and constitutional legitimacy.”

The militia of Central Libya Shield is part of the forces of the Shield “Ad-Douroua” of Libya which again are part of Fajr Libya. The Shield “Ad-Douroua” of Libya can be seen as an army reserve of the GNC with a special budget. Their opponents see them as having an Islamist orientation, whereas their supporters say it is the beginning of a new army. Their leaders oppose the growing domination of nomadic Arab tribes led by Zintan tribes over the security forces. The Shield “Ad-Douroua” forces are divided into, the Central Shield, which extends from Misrata to
the south and it participated in securing Sabha and Barak Ashati, the Western Shield, its mission is to secure the western region in Ezzouia, Sabratha, and Tripoli and the Eastern Shield which is divided into Shield One led by Wissem Ben Hamid and Shield Two led by Mohamed Laribi, nicknamed Boka and whose death was announced on 22 March 2015 in Benghazi during fights against the forces of General Khalifa Haftar.

On July 13th 2014, the “Shield of Ad-Douroua” militia launched a counterattack against the Karama operation that began in May 2014 under the leadership of Major General Khalifa Haftar. The operation was designed against the armed Islamist militant movements in Benghazi and other parts of the country. The purpose was also to retake Tripoli International Airport and a number of military installations in the neighboring areas, which since 2011 had been under the control of Hafer’s forces, the majority of whom are from Zintan.

• The Salafist movement

It is fragmented and does not operate within a single organizational framework. They are mainly in the Western Region (Tripoli and its suburbs, Ezzouia, Misrata, Al Khoms and Zliten) and through their presence at local mosques they are able to disseminate their ideas. They even prevented the Ministry of Awqaf from controlling many of the mosques in these cities. The Salafist movement sympathizes with the Medkhali ideology from Saudi Arabia, named after Sheikh Rabii Medkhali. They observe Islamist doctrines on how to dress, behave, obedience to the ruler even if this ruler was unjust. They work to promote virtue and prevent vice, they reject women joining the workforce, and are fighting against what they describe as “fads and polytheism” such as visiting graves and tombs. The Salafist movement did not participate in the revolution, since it considered the uprising a departure from the authority of the Master.

The group participated in the democratic process and created the “Party of Assala and Tajdeed” (“Originality and Innovation Party”), which is of a Salafist orientation. They participated in the last elections but did not win. The group participates in Eastern Libya in the fight against Ansar al-Sharia alongside forces of Major General Khalifa Hafter. The Salafist movement describes its opponents as Al Khawarej and their leader is Ashraf Menyar.

Generally speaking, all these Movements can be considered as “moderate” to an extent that it is possible to interact with them. They believe in the state, its institutions and its organs and do not accuse society of apostasy; therefore they do not represent a significant danger to the community. A strong government should be prepared to enter a dialogue with them, rather than putting all Islamist movements in the same basket. It is important to distinguish between moderate Islamist movements such as Addouroua on the one hand, and other Islamist movements, which apostatize society, the army and police, on the other hand.

The government mishandled the situation by putting all Islamist movements in one basket. This resulted in the formation of an alliance of Islamist movements.
against the Karama operation. Both movements, extremist as well as moderate ones such as the Addouroua, united in a structure they refer to as “The Council of Benghazi rebels”, designed to jointly fight against the Libyan army under the leadership of General Hafter in Benghazi.

3.3.2 The Brigades with extremist Islamist tendencies

Apart from moderate Islamist movements, there are extremist Islamist tendencies, among them.

• Ansar al-Sharia

This organization is spreading in the eastern region especially in the cities of Benghazi, Darnah and Al Bayda. It is waging war in Benghazi against General Khalifa Haftar’s forces. Ansar al Sharia has endorsed a Salafist jihadist ideology embraced by al-Qaida. Its fighters took part in the uprising against the Kaddafi regime in February 2011 as individuals. They then joined forces and rallied behind their leaders, most of whom had been inmates in Abu Salim prison. There is no accurate estimate of the number of its fighters united.

During the uprising, Ansar al Sharia seized a huge quantity of what they call the “spoils of war”, mainly weapons, ammunition, vehicles and funds left by Kaddafi’s militias. The organization’s recruitment has been focused on uneducated young people.

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya publicly declared its formation for the first time in February 2012, and held its founding congress in June of the same year, which was attended by nearly 1,000 people. Ansar al-Sharia refuses to accept the democratic process and elections. It recognizes neither the state nor the current government. It calls for the establishment of an Islamist state in accordance with a militant interpretation of religion and ideology. It believes that the armed struggle against the governing authorities and their armies is the only way to establish an Islamist state and apply Sharia law.

The organization apostatizes all secular, national and pan-Arab organizations, which it accuses of heresy and therefore an enemy of Islam and Muslims. The organization does not benefit from the support of Libyan society as it is adopting takfiri jihadist ideology that is not in accordance with the religious beliefs of Libyans.

Ansar al-Sharia announced in a statement that, “The truthful Mujahideen ‘fighters’ such as Ansar al-Sharia, and others, were not involved and planning to stay away from the country’s existing political conflict. They were clear from the onset that they did not believe in democracy because it brought devastation, destruction and discord between Muslims, the loss of security, the spread of vice, the growth of sin and the persistence of infidelity in Islamic countries. The organization stressed that it would not accept any system other than the Islamic Sharia as a ruling system between Muslims, and as a militia is not allowed to fight for democracy. Ansar al Sharia believes that the West will never leave until Libyans believe in its religion as the Almighty said: “And the Jews shall by no means be pleased with thee, nor the Christians unless they follow their creed”. Chapter II, Verse 121”

The organization is accused of being behind the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi in September 2012, in which the US ambassador Chris Stevens and three other US citizens died. There are two branches of Ansar al-Sharia outside the city of Benghazi: Ansar al-Sharia in Sirte and Ansar al-Sharia in Ajdabiya, later was established on 4 August 2013.

The Sirte branch was established on June 28, 2013 in Sirte, after the security committee was abolished and they decided to join Ansar al-Sharia. It changed its name to become Ansar al-Sharia Sirte. The Commander of the branch was Ahmed Ali Al Tir, nicknamed “Abu Ali” while Fawzi Ayat was appointed the spokesman of Ansar al-Sharia Sirte, he is also a member of the Wakef “Endowment” office in Sirte.

Ansar al-Sharia is one of the most dangerous Islamist movements as it has a jihadist ideology that is extremely anchored in militancy. It categorically rejects the concept of the modern civil state and democracy, and does not recognize dialogue with those who do not share the same ideology. It considers them as infidels.
• The Islamic State “Daesh” of Noufaliya

It is a movement founded in the vicinity of Misrata. It is called by that name due to the absence of additional information about it. It’s a radical movement which is close to Ansar al-Sharia Sirte. Its fighters have recently led attacks against some oil fields such as the Bahi oilfield and brutally killed its guards before returning to Noufaliya east of Sirte.

Several clashes took place between this group and the Al Shurook forces of Misrata. A person named Al Qarqaa leads the movement. It is believed that there is a close relationship between them and the commander of the so-called “oil installations guards”, Ibrahim Al Jadharan. He supports this movement because the region of Noufaliya is inhabited by the Al Maghariba tribe to which the guards of oil facilities and their leader Al Jadharan belong.

• The Militia of the Martyrs of Abu Salim

Derna is considered the stronghold of this militia whose fighters amount to hundreds of jihadists. They bear the ideology of al-Qaida. It participated actively in the 2011 uprising, given the history of its members who had spent most of their lives in the Kaddafi regime’s prisons. The militia completely refuses to recognize the government and the democratic process. Abdelkader Azzouz is the chairman of the militia’s Shura Council and its most prominent leader. He is in his late thirties, and spent 12 years in the prisons of the Kaddafi regime.

The community accuses the militia of being involved in the assassinations and murders of those who were known for their loyalty to the Kaddafi regime or who were part of its security apparatus. The inhabitants hold the militia responsible for the bombings that have occurred recently in the city of Derna. For these reasons, the Abu Salim Martyrs militia is unpopular by the Libyans.

• The Shura Council of the Youth of Derna

It announced its establishment on 8 April 2014. There is no accurate information available about the militia, and the nature of the council, which is close to Ansar al-Sharia. It is located in Derna which is its stronghold. It has its own committee to settle disputes and a Sharia court. The militia does not recognize the democratic process and elections. It describes them as non-Islamist. It does neither recognize the state nor the current government. It calls for the establishment of an “Islamist state” in accordance with its vision.

• Al Battar Militia

It calls itself «the Libyan Al Nusra», (“Support of the people of Libya”) similar to the Al-Nusra Front in Syria. The militia was established in Syria in 2012, then it pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. Its fighters returning from Syria created the branch in Derna. It published several statements, which confirmed its support for Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. There are no available data on the militia because it is highly secretive.

The study of Islamist movements in Libya shows that there are two types of these movements. There are moderate movements that can be convinced to accept dialogue because they recognize the civil state. The second type however is militant, does not recognize dialogue and the democratic process, does not believe in the state, and apostatizes the community and all those who disagree with them. These kind of movements do not have the support of Libyan people and have no popular base. It attracts mainly young people without money.

It should be noted that there is no relationship between moderate movements and militant ones. There are very deep ideological, intellectual and political differences, although they may unite if necessary to fight a common enemy for example in the case of the Addouroua militias who joined an alliance with Ansar al-Sharia to fight the army in Benghazi as they both reject Major General Khalifa Haftar and the army.

The majority of these movements are not well structured and have no popular base. Each movement has deep internal contradictions, which confirm that their chances to control the public landscape in Libya are weak.
4. Conclusion

The study shows the reality of Islamist movements in Libya and their social and political challenges. It shows also that the chances of extending their control over the public landscape and the establishment of a religious state are weak. They lack a united and clear vision for a political program that could prevent a deterioration of the general situation and help build a sustainable future.

The low chances of those movements enhance the contradiction of their stances on the nature of the political system they would like to establish. Moreover they lack the organization, as well as the institutional and leadership structures necessary to implement their religious plans, which do not enjoy popular support. Libyan society looks at those movements as alien “entities” not only socially, but also religiously as they convey an extremist and jihadist ideology that apostatizes a moderate religious community, that endorses the values of tolerance and moderation and rejects all forms of violence as a means and method to change the situation.

Furthermore, there are contradictory visions within the same movement ranging from extremism to moderation, as is the case between both Osama Al Salabi, the commander of one of the rebel militias in Benghazi, and his brother Ali Al Salabi, the former being more extremist than the latter, although they both belong to one single movement.

Islamist movements in Libya are facing serious social, political and cultural challenges they are unable to overcome. The challenges weakening their chances of political domination are:

1. The sharp conflict between these movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist Jamaa for Change. They are rejected by the majority of their own community, while the project of political Islam has failed in the Arab region. This confirms that these movements do not have social depth within the community, where the most prominent feature are its tribal roots, and its conservative religious behavior in accordance with the moderate Sunni Maliki doctrine.

2. A homogenous and unified population in Libya, which overwhelmingly believes in Islam according to the Sunni doctrine. That’s despite the presence of a small number of followers of the Ibadhi doctrine in the Jebel Al Gharbi, but the majority of the population rejects and fights extremism.

3. A tribal structure that characterizes Libyan society, especially tribes concerned by the intentions of Islamists, such as the Ouertella, Guedadfa, Megarha and Ouled Suleiman tribes, living in the western region and in the province of Fezzan in the south. The tribal and social fabric is one of the most important barriers that will prevent Islamist movements from achieving their plans. Tribes represent a buffer against any attempt to undermine the foundations of the social and religious values that the Libyan people are attached to. Libyans also reject any project that is in contradiction to their religious believes and social values.

4. The sharp difference between these movements in the country’s east and west, both in terms of thinking or as well as the relationship with the outside world. While the East of Libya seems more homogenous than the West, the movements are split both intellectually as well as politically but agree on one issue, namely their opposition to the army under the command of Major General Khalifa Haftar, which means the alliances are frail and temporary, not strategic.

5. Recommendations

In this chapter some recommendations can be made, which could contribute to find a solution to the current state of chaos and might provide a possibility to involve and integrate Islamists into the political process:

a. An agreement between political forces on the nature of the state:

The future of a democratic Libya is closely linked to a national consensus on the establishment of a civil state, that is based on popular legitimacy and manages the
affairs of the country based on principles of citizenship. A state that can guarantee the same chances, rights and duties for all Libyans. A national consensus on the nature of the state will contribute to reducing tensions during the transitional process, and would contribute to the stability of the country through winning popular support, which would reduce the influence of armed movements.

b. Encourage the establishment of civil society organizations:

In democratic societies, political parties do not monopolize the landscape. They are societies where civil society organizations play a major role in the dissemination of civic universal values. Democratic Libya needs to disseminate a civic culture through the establishment of associations and organizations that will supervise Libyans and educate them to adopt a political culture open to different cultures and civilizations.

c. The use of Libyan oil as a weapon to fight extremism,

Oil revenues can be redistributed between individuals or between regions and tribes. A large share of these revenues should be devoted to establishing an educational and instructional system to raise people on the principles and values of modernity through intellectual openness and the right to difference and the refusal of violence, in order to combat extremism, spread the moderate culture of Islam, and contribute to the development of the economy.

d. The establishment of a modern educational system

It is the only locomotive of sustainable development, and the most effective way to educate young generations on modern civic values that should promote the right to dissent and the respect for human rights within a context of civil peace, as well as the dissemination of intellectual and cultural values of openness and the rejection of all forms of isolation and political violence. The reform must be achieved in parallel with religious education and the curriculum should be developed by state institutions.

e. Coordination with neighboring countries

In order to clamp down on militant Islamist movements this recommendation is urgent, especially in light of the poor performance of the Libyan state in securing its borders, which have been exploited by militant movements to spread their ideas and contact other movements sharing the same ideologies in neighboring countries. Economic and security coordination resulted in the Tunis meeting in March 2012, and in high level agreements on economic exchanges and security coordination, with the purpose of securing the borders and combatting arms smuggling. Fighting these militant movements also requires coordination with major countries in order to support Libya in building security institutions, and assist it to manage the democratic transitional process successfully.

f. Urge militant movements to switch to civil institutions:

The West has seriously tried since 2015 to involve moderate Islamists, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, in the political process, so that the situation does not deteriorate further, especially after the beginning of the Karama operation. The purpose should be to work together in order to prevent the spread of militant movements on Libyan territory in close proximity to Europe. The focus of the West to engage moderate Islamists in government is based on the belief that the exclusion of all Islamists with all their factions from the political landscape will lead to spawning more radical jihadist movements, who will threaten not only Libya but also Western countries. This would represent a catastrophe the West is trying to avoid at this stage through the integration of moderate Islamism in power.

To sum up in order to successfully involve Islamists in power, a political strategy with short and long-term
goals needs to be established, which will push the Muslim Brotherhood to make radical ideological, intellectual and political changes in order to establish a modern and civil political party. This would represent a qualitative shift and enable them to profit from a political openness that believes in political co-existence in a civic state within the rule of law.
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About the Author:
For security reasons, the author of the publication does not want to be mentioned.