



# PERSPECTIVES

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## Battleground Africa: The Muslim Brotherhood's Next Frontier

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,679, August 6, 2020

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** For the Muslim Brotherhood, the Libyan conflict is an opportunity to flex its muscles in the “weak link” of the Arab Muslim world. Weak African countries have once again become recruiting grounds for Qatar-funded and Turkey-backed Islamist ideologues. For all the criticism of the shortcomings of the governing structure in Sudan, the political alternatives that are emerging thanks to the Brotherhood’s alliance with leftists and Communists may be far worse.

Sudan’s recent announcement of the detention of [122 mercenaries](#) heading for Libya may point to a growing interest by the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognized government of Libya based in Tripoli, and Turkey in recruiting fighters from around Africa to supplement the local militias and Syrian mercenaries imported to fight the Libyan National Army (LNA), the military of the House of Representatives (HoR) based in East Libya. The detained Sudanese denied that they were involved in the hostilities in Libya, but they were certainly headed in that direction—with at least eight children in tow.

Most of the group consisted of young men. Sudan’s FM Asma Abdalla said Sudan is not involved in foreign conflicts, but allegations that Sudan, as well as other African countries, are recruiting grounds for mercenaries in the Libya conflict have persisted for years. Hundreds of former [Janjaweed militias](#) who were once active in Darfur allegedly joined the LNA force led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

Mercenaries from [Sudan and Chad](#) joining both sides of the conflict have been known to congregate along with their Russian and Syrian counterparts. The UAE is [rumored](#) to have enlisted Sudanese fighters to back Haftar, as the Sudanese government is more aligned with the Egypt/UAE/Saudi Arabia bloc backing the

LNA after the fall of Bashir. On the other hand, some of the more Islamist-aligned fighters from the circles close to Bashir, as well as other groups of mercenaries from Chad, are [known](#) to have sided with the GNA and been attacked by Haftar, who accused them of contributing to the escalation of the conflict. (The GNA blamed them, rather than Haftar, for the rising violence in 2018.) There are rumors that former Janjaweed leader Hemedti (Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo) agreed to send 1,200 Sudanese fighters to [join](#) Haftar after the UAE threatened to cut off aid, but most of these allegations come from the pro-GNA camp.

The reality may be more complicated. European analysts describe the situation in Sudan as “failing” for these reasons: “dark money” (humanitarian aid) from the Gulf States has led to lack of accountability; the “ruthless” and “authoritarian” Hemedti is alleged to be next in line to lead the country; the paramilitary forces aligned with Hemedti are uncontrollable and at odds with Sudan’s military; political reforms have not even begun; the economic situation is fraught with challenges; and the international community has failed to come to Sudan’s aid, leaving suffocating sanctions in place that have made it difficult for the government to act.

These analysts blame the failure of democracy in Sudan on excessive interventionism by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. However, they view the breakdown of the [allegedly reformist forces](#) that represent democracy, freedom, and change as uniformly affiliated with Communists and other hard leftists, Islamists, and other ideological extremists that are backed by Qatar and Turkey. Youth groups without any specific ideology, professionals, and so-called “resistance committees” are seen as opposed to the direction of the government and seemingly in the same sphere as the leftist/Islamist “democratic” alliance.

The meaning of this is that even if these groups are ultimately pursuing different goals, they are willing to align to pressure the government—which, given the course of the assorted Arab Spring-like movements and revolutions, means they will sooner or later be coopted, corrupted, subsumed, or destroyed by the more experienced and ideologically grounded leftist/Islamist forces. What that should tell the international community is that Saudi Arabia and the UAE have prioritized geopolitical issues in Africa, such as combating Islamists, which they perceive as a direct threat to their own interests.

In the meantime, no Western countries have stepped forward to assist with the development and protection of civic institutions that are in Sudan’s interest and impermeable to influence by Islamists or other extremists.

The result is that the civil society was left largely to meander on its own as factions continued to struggle for power. This alliance’s political victory could mean a return to Bashir’s times, which no one should want, or even worse.

Whatever the issues the government is struggling with, the situation in Sudan is far from stable. The Muslim Brotherhood seems to be resurgent in the weak country even as it loses ground elsewhere in the Middle East. Brotherhood forces were involved in a number of violent incidents and terrorist attacks [targeting](#) Sudan's and Egypt's military and government officials in January and February of 2020.

Following these incidents, Sudanese intelligence released an official report pertaining to [links](#) between the Brotherhood and Libya's GNA, the Bashir government, and other African countries. The report shows that after the fall of Bashir, the GNA reached out to radical Islamists and conscripted them to fight in Libya. The document indicates that around the time of the attempted terrorist attacks in January, Tripoli increased its number of mercenaries over a 14-day period. They were contracted for six months.

Incoming mercenaries join "work units" from Syria and Turkey, as well as local Libyan militias. The specific militia in question is known as "Atonement and Immigration" and consists of the Osama Juweili (Gouili) Brigades. At the time of the attacks, Gouili was the West Libyan regional military commander for the unified Tripoli defense line from Zintan to Misrata. It includes radical groups and well-known terrorists like Emaid Altrabulsi, local radical Islamist militias, and "an unspecified number of militants from Sudan, Niger, and Syria." The majority are Sudanese mercenaries, according to the report. In addition, reinforcements are coming to other Tripoli militias from Sudan, Chad, and Syria. Their last departure point is provided by Turkey.

In the two weeks prior to the publication of the report, these gangs had attracted at least 200 foreign mercenaries, who were also contracted for six months. Another gang, the "al-Fajr" group relegated to Operations HQ for the Libyan Shura, is led by Shabaan Hadia. He has ties to Abdel Raoud Qara and the Special Deterrence Forces in Tripoli and participated in the incorporation of al-Qaeda terrorists into the ranks of the Tripoli militias.

The report further lists high-level GNA officials who were previously militia commanders involved in the recruitment of mercenaries from Sudan and Niger. Some of these officials previously served as links between the Tripoli militias and the Sudanese branch of al-Qaeda, as well as with convicted terrorist members. Some are responsible for past abductions, including that of the Libyan PM in 2014 and six employees of the Egyptian embassy, who were later released. Some are thought to be linked to war crimes in the form of civilian massacres in West Libyan cities, including in hospitals.

It can be inferred from the contents of the report that the Muslim Brotherhood has shifted its focus to the Muslim world's "weak link"— conflicted or otherwise

challenged African countries with weak civil societies and a lack of social infrastructure. The Brotherhood is exploiting conflicts, geopolitical tensions, government corruption, and lack of trust in leadership or within coalitions to insert its political and ideological influence into these militias and to direct the course of the conflict, regardless of the original intent of the GNA.

Turkey and other actors backing the GNA are directly facilitating this expanding foreign network of globalized Islamist combatants as they take over local conflicts. Their aim is to further break down borders, destabilize the countries in question, take advantage of political tensions, alienate potentially influential actors that could otherwise play a role in facilitating good governance and economic stability, and globalize the conflicts. The ultimate objective is a return to the “Ottoman Empire” according to Turkey’s “[defense line](#)” parameters, or to an Islamic Caliphate according to the terms of the Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, including al-Qaeda and a newly resurgent ISIS.

While the LNA might rely on some number of foreign mercenaries, the mercenaries aligned with the GNA have an ideological agenda far beyond the immediate conflict. The Muslim Brotherhood has systematically worked to undermine the legitimacy of the Sudanese and Egyptian governments through attempted terrorist attacks, assassinations, and disinformation. It has used Western media and human rights NGOs to sell its involvement as “democracy” in action, and is now exploiting the weak coalitions in Libya to advance its own influence alongside Turkey and Qatar. Unless Muslim Brotherhood influence is expunged completely from this conflict and others, these battles will continue indefinitely, as Qatar is not short on funding.

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