

Libya: Extremism & Counter-Extremism

On January 4, 2020, the Libyan National Army (LNA) launched an airstrike on a military academy in Tripoli. The attack killed 16 and wounded at least 37 others. Fighting between the LNA—which is led by General Khalifa Haftar—and an array of militias tied to the U.N.-supported government, has been ongoing since April, and has escalated in recent weeks after Haftar’s declaration of a “final” and decisive battle for Tripoli on December 12, 2019. A couple of weeks later, on January 2, 2020, Turkish lawmakers authorized the deployment of troops into Libya. Haftar’s LNA and the eastern government are supported by France, Russia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while the internationally recognized government in Tripoli is backed by Turkey, Italy, and Qatar. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [1], [Al Jazeera](#) [2], [Associated Press](#) [3])

On December 10, 2019, the U.N. Security Council releases a 376-page report detailing the deteriorating security situation in Libya. Prepared by a panel of experts, the report claims that Libya is not only targeted as “one of the main axes” of ISIS’s future operations, but that the country will continue to be embroiled in violent attacks due to an increase in the presence of Chadian and Sudanese fighters throughout the war-torn country. The influx of foreign fighters primarily support the LNA, as they guard critical infrastructure so that Haftar’s troops can carry out offensive operations against the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognized government of Libya. Additionally, the panel claims that ISIS will now direct its focus onto Libya, quoting a video in July by an Islamic State leader in Libya, Mahmud Massud al-Baraassi. In the video, the report said, “he highlighted that Libya was now one of the main axes of future ISIL operations, which are designed to compensate for the loss of ground” in Syria. (Source: [U.S. News](#) [4])

Overview

ISIS was officially established in Libya in November 2014. Since then, the group has become the most powerful ISIS affiliate outside of Syria and Iraq as well as the most powerful extremist group operating in Libya. A number of Islamist extremist groups compete with ISIS, such as the Derna Protection Forces, a coalition of Islamist groups fighting against Libyan government forces that has also pledged to drive ISIS out of Libya. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [5], [The Maghrebi Note](#) [6], [CNN](#) [7], [New York Times](#) [8], [Reuters](#) [9])

Rival governments in Tripoli and Tobruk further complicate Libya’s political landscape and ability to combat extremists. Following a widespread loss for Islamist parties in the 2014 parliamentary elections, Islamist parties established a rival parliament in Tripoli and pushed the internationally recognized Council of Deputies legislature out of the capital to the Libyan city of Tobruk. Yet another faction, the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar, dominates the country’s eastern region. This governmental split has allowed Islamist groups to operate with near impunity and has enabled Libya to become a hub for the smuggling and sale of arms, migrants, and drugs to prop up terror entities. (Sources: [Latin American Herald Tribune](#) [10], [Yahoo News](#) [11], [United States Institute for Peace \(USIP\)](#) [12])

In December 2015, representatives of Libya’s rival governments signed a U.N.-brokered power-sharing agreement in Morocco to form a national unity government, the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA). By March 2016, the Tripoli-based GNA assumed sole authority in Libya. In October 2016, however, Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell of the former Islamist Government of National Salvation (GNS), attempted to revive the Islamist governing body by staging an attempted coup against the GNA. Backed by the presidential guard and several Islamist militias, Ghwell seized control of several government buildings, including the parliament. The GNA and GNS continue to compete for power in Tripoli. On January 12, 2017, the GNS seized additional GNA buildings, including the ministries of defense, martyrs’ affairs, and labor. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [13], [Guardian](#) [14], [CNN](#) [15], [Reuters](#) [16], [Reuters](#) [17], [Washington Post](#) [18], [European Council on Foreign Relations](#) [19], [Associated Press](#) [20], [Libyan Observer](#) [21])

In May 2016, GNA forces, in coordination with pro-government militias, launched a battle for the coastal city of Sirte, which had become an ISIS stronghold. On August 1, the United States launched Operation Odyssey Lightning in support of the Libyan offensive. On December 5, forces loyal to the GNA and backed by U.S. airstrikes seized full control Sirte. The U.S. military officially ended its operations in Sirte on December 21, 2016, following the capture of the city. The U.S. military has continued to carry out airstrikes in Libya against ISIS and al-Qaeda targets. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [22], [Al Arabiya](#) [23], [Guardian](#) [24], [Reuters](#) [25], [Wall Street Journal](#) [26], [Deutsche Welle](#) [27], [Voice of America](#) [28])

In a move to demonstrate support for nascent political stability in Libya, the Italian government reopened its embassy in

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Tripoli on January 10, 2017. Italy closed its embassy in Libya in 2015, along with many other Western countries, in response to increased violence. Italy’s foreign minister said the reopening showed “confidence in the process of stabilizing the country.” (Source: [Al Araby](#) [29])

On April 24, 2017, following meetings in Rome overseen by Italian Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano, the leaders of Libya’s rival factions—represented by Ageela Saleh, president of the House of Representatives, and Abdulrahman Sewehli, president of the state council—reached a new political agreement to resolve differences. In particular, the parties discussed the future military and political role in any unity government of Libyan National Army Commander Khalifa Haftar. In July 2017, the opposing governments reached a ceasefire agreement and called for national elections, which are expected in December 2018. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [30], [BBC News](#) [31], [CNN](#) [32], [Al Jazeera](#) [33])

Most of the Libyan population is staunchly opposed to Islamic extremism and terrorism and supports a centralized Libyan government. Unlike ISIS recruiting efforts in Iraq and Syria, where the group has benefited from Sunni-Shiite rivalries, the Libyan power struggle exists among Libya-based Sunni Islamist groups, pro-government factions and ISIS sympathizers. (Sources: [Yahoo News](#) [34], [Associated Press](#) [35], [Newsweek](#) [36], [Foreign Policy](#) [37])

Radicalization and Foreign Fighters

Libya is formally run by the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli since December 2015, when Libya’s rival parliaments—the Islamist General National Council (GNC) in Tripoli and the House of Representatives in Tobruk (HoR)—signed a U.N.-brokered power-sharing agreement.

However, ever since an attempted coup by the Government of National Salvation (GNS) in October 2016, the GNS has seized several GNA government facilities. The GNA and GNS continue to compete for governing power in Tripoli. Under the December 2015 power-sharing agreement, the HoR in Tobruk is supposed to be the legislative authority of Libya. The HoR, however, endorsed another rival government in the eastern city of al-Bayda led by Abdullah al-Thinini. The HoR and al-Bayda governments are under control of the Libya National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar, an anti-Islamist military leader. Outside the government are Islamist jihadist groups such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, among other smaller groups. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [38], [International Crisis Group](#) [39], [European Council on Foreign Relations](#) [19], [Associated Press](#) [20], [Libya Observer](#) [21])

On May 18, 2017, members of a militia loyal to the U.N.-backed GNA in Tripoli allegedly carried out summary executions of mostly soldiers loyal to Haftar’s LNA at Brak El-Shati, an airbase in southern Libya, killing 141 people. An LNA spokesman said victims included civilians who worked at the airbase or were in the nearby area. The GNA denied ordering the attack, condemned it, and set up a commission of inquiry to investigate it. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [40], [Guardian](#) [41])

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya

[Ansar al-Sharia in Libya](#) [42] (ASL) was a violent jihadist group that sought to implement sharia (Islamic law) in Libya. ASL emerged in 2011 during the Libyan civil war as a result of the union between the Ansar al-Sharia Brigade in Benghazi (ASB) and Ansar al-Sharia Derna (ASD). In 2012, ASB and ASD, alongside other Islamist militant groups, attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, killing four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [43], [Foreign Policy](#) [44])

Beginning in 2012, ASL increased ties with international violent jihadist groups, including by holding clandestine meetings with al-Qaeda affiliates in North Africa and training and exporting fighters to conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Mali. In the past, ASL’s former leader, Mohamed al-Zahawi, had openly declared his support for al-Qaeda. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [43], [Foreign Policy](#) [44])

Despite some initial media reports that the two groups were aligned, ISIS posed a major threat to ASL. Like many Islamist groups in Libya, ASL resisted calls to swear allegiance to ISIS’s leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and ASL has suffered numerous prominent defections to ISIS. In winter 2014-2015, ISIS captured the previously ASL-dominated cities of Derna and Sirte although ASL was able to maintain a presence on the outskirts of Derna. In June 2015, ASL and ISIS came into open conflict. (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [45], [The Wasat](#) [46], [BBC News](#) [47])

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Since the start of the Syrian civil war, ASL has trained militants seeking to fight in Syria. ASL has also trained militants and who have joined other North African jihadist groups. For example, half of the 24 militants involved in the January 2013 Algerian In Amenas gas complex attack had trained in ASL camps in Benghazi. (Sources: [All Africa](#) [48], [Newsweek](#) [49], [Al-Wasat](#) [46], [i24 News](#) [50], [Al Jazeera](#) [51])

In August 2014, ASL joined the newly formed Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), a merger of several Islamist and Jihadist factions in Benghazi, in the hopes of remaining a participant in political negotiations. In the summer of 2016, ASL and the BRSC joined the umbrella organization Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) as the Libyan National Army bore down on the Islamist factions in Benghazi. Analysts saw the merger as a sign of ASL's weakening presence in the country. After enduring three years of debilitating losses of fighters and leaders, ASL officially disbanded on May 28, 2017. (Sources: [Jamestown Foundation](#) [52], [Long War Journal](#) [53], [Al Jazeera](#) [54])

ISIS in Libya

[ISIS](#) [55] established itself in Libya by winning allegiance from local groups like the Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islami (MSSI). The transnational terror group also relies on Libyan recruits who have returned home from fighting in Iraq and Syria. (Sources: [The Maghrebi Note](#) [6], [Business Insider](#) [56], [CNN](#) [57], [Wall Street Journal](#) [58], [Guardian](#) [59])

In December 2014, U.S. officials reported that ISIS was running training camps in the Green Mountains, which are just outside of Derna. In January 2015, Wissam abd Zaid al-Jubori, a former Iraqi Special Forces officer and now ISIS Governor of Kirkuk, was dispatched to Libya to help establish an ISIS branch in Tripoli. ISIS has divided Libya into three states or *wilayat*: Wilayat Tripolitania, the western province, Wilayat Fezzan, the southern province, and Wilayat Barqa, the eastern province. (Sources: [The Maghrebi Note](#) [6], [Business Insider](#) [56], [CNN](#) [57], [Wall Street Journal](#) [58], [Guardian](#) [59])

A commander of the Libya Dawn forces stated that Libyan ISIS fighters "have been joined by foreigners, Sudanese, Tunisians, Egyptians, Yemenis." Reports have found that European foreign fighters for ISIS have increasingly favored joining ISIS in Libya in order to avoid government detection. Due to heightened screening measures at European airports, militants have started crossing to Europe via ferry, transiting to Italy, then sailing to Tunisia, from where they can cross into Libya. (Sources: [The Maghrebi Note](#) [6], [Business Insider](#) [56], [CNN](#) [57], [Wall Street Journal](#) [58], [Guardian](#) [59])

In spring 2015, ISIS began expanding in the central coast of Libya, eventually seizing and establishing a stronghold in the city of Sirte. In February 2016, American intelligence estimated that the ISIS affiliate in Libya numbered 6,500 fighters. By August 2016, however, the U.S. military estimated that ISIS ranks had shrank to somewhere between a few hundred and 2,000 fighters. In mid-January 2017, the Pentagon acknowledged that ISIS ranks in Libya had fallen but would not say by how much. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [60], [NBC News](#) [61], [Air Force Times](#) [62])

On May 12, 2016, the Libyan unity government in coordination with pro-government militias launched a major offensive against ISIS in Sirte. In August 2016, the United States began supporting the Libyan forces with airstrikes to help retake the city. By October 2016, pro-government forces captured most the city from ISIS, leaving a few hundred militants backed into a single street in northern Sirte. On December 5, 2016, Libyan officials announced that the pro-government forces officially seized full control of the Sirte from the terror group. (Sources: [Al-Arabiya](#) [63], [New York Times](#) [64], [Washington Post](#) [18], [Reuters](#) [25], [New York Times](#) [22])

In mid-January 2017, the U.S. military conducted airstrikes near Sirte against terrorist training camps where ISIS members were believed to be planning terrorist attacks in Europe, killing as many as 80. Prior to the airstrikes, trucks were seen carrying fighters and rocket-propelled grenades into the camps. Then U.S. Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said those killed "were actively plotting operations in Europe and may also have been connected to attacks that have already occurred in Europe." In September 2017, the United States launched its first airstrikes in Libya under President Donald Trump, killing 17 alleged ISIS fighters. Two June 2018 U.S. airstrikes killed four ISIS fighters and an al-Qaeda militant. An August 2018 U.S. airstrike killed an "ISIS-Libya terrorist," according to the U.S. Africa Command. (Source: [Guardian](#) [65], [Fox News](#) [66], [NBC News](#) [67], [NBC News](#) [68], [Voice of America](#) [28])

In May 2017, possible links emerged between ISIS elements in Libya and a deadly bombing in the United Kingdom. Two days after the May 22 Manchester concert attack, the Libyan anti-terrorism force, the Special Deterrence Force, arrested the father of suicide attacker Salman Abedi and his younger brother Hashem in Tripoli. Abedi's father, Ramadan, had

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alleged links to the al-Qaeda-backed Libyan Islamic Fighting group in the 1990s. Hashem Abedi reportedly confessed to Libyan forces that both he and his brother were members of ISIS and that Hashem “knew all the details” of the plan to commit an attack in Manchester. Hashem may also have been planning a separate attack in Tripoli. Salman Abedi, a British citizen of Libyan descent, reportedly spent four weeks in Libya before returning to Manchester to carry out the attack, for which ISIS claimed responsibility. While in Libya, he reportedly met with members of an ISIS cell linked to a November 2015 terror attack in Paris. In November 2017, the U.K. government requested Hashem Abedi’s extradition, which the Special Deterrence Force refused. The British government has since issued an arrest warrant for Abedi. (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [69], [Washington Post](#) [70], [Fox News](#) [71], [New York Times](#) [72], [New York Times](#) [73], [Daily Mail](#) [74], [Reuters](#) [75])

Manchester is home to one of the largest Libyan communities outside Libya, according to Nazir Afsal, a former British prosecutor. An unspecified but significant number of Libyans from Manchester have left as foreign fighters to Libya and Syria, according to Raffaello Pantucci, a terrorism expert at the Royal United Services Institute of London. (Source: [New York Times](#) [72])

Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islami

In June 2014, Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islami (MSSI, Shura Council of Islamic Youth) became the first group in Libya to declare allegiance to ISIS. Based in Derna, MSSI are extremists who have returned from fighting in Mali, Algeria, and Syria. After aligning itself with ISIS, MSSI was subsumed into “The Islamic State in Libya.” As part of ISIS, MSSI began to impose sharia in Derna, executing two men for theft and murder in July, publicly executing another in a football stadium in August, and flogging several for alcohol consumption. (Sources: [Washington Institute](#) [76], [Institute for the Study of War](#) [77])

In September 2014, ISIS emir [Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi](#) [78] dispatched his senior aide [Abu Nabil al-Anbari](#) [79] to help seize Derna. Al-Anbari worked closely with MSSI. In October 2014, MSSI with support from ISIS was able to take over a number of public buildings in Derna and recast them as sharia committees, courts, and governance buildings. On November 10, 2014, alongside multiple jihadist groups in Algeria, Egypt, and Yemen, MSSI officially declared allegiance to ISIS. (Sources: [Institute for the Study of War](#) [77], [The Line of Steel](#) [80])

Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade

The Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade (ASMB), an Islamist militia based in Derna, battled Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi’s forces during the 2011 civil war. Abd al-Hakim al-Hasadi created the Darnah Brigade early on during the war, and the group later renamed itself the ASMB. The group’s goal is to establish an Islamic state within Libya. In mid-2012, they began working toward that end, closing beauty parlors and enforcing strict social-conduct laws. (Sources: [TRAC](#) [81], [Time](#) [82])

After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Abu Sufyan bin Qumu, a known al-Qaeda affiliate and later founder of Ansar al-Sharia Derna, joined the leadership of the ASMB. Qumu reportedly led training for the group. He later broke from the group over disagreements about his connections with al-Qaeda. A video, thought to have been filmed in spring 2012, showed another al-Qaeda operative, Abd al-Basit Azuz, speaking to the ASMB in Derna. Azuz, a former member of the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan, had reportedly been dispatched to Derna by al-Qaeda emir [Ayman al-Zawahiri](#) [83] to establish an al-Qaeda presence in the city. (Sources: [TRAC](#) [81], [Time](#) [82], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [84])

Vying for power in March 2012, ASMB militants reportedly assassinated Muhammad al-Hasi, a former Libyan army colonel in charge of internal security in Derna. Despite the ASMB’s suspected role in the assassination, the group was soon after incorporated into the Libyan government’s Supreme Security Committee (SSC), the Ministry of the Interior’s nascent security force. (Sources: [TRAC](#) [81], [Time](#) [82], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [84], [The Line of Steel](#) [80])

In 2014, the ASMB came increasingly in conflict with the jihadist group Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islami (MSSI). MSSI regarded the ASMB as too connected to the Libyan government, as the ASMB had provided security for Libyan government officials and had joined the SSC. Unlike MSSI, the ASMB has consistently refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS. (Sources: [TRAC](#) [81], [Time](#) [82], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [84], [The Line of Steel](#) [80], [New York Times](#) [8])

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In May 2014, MSSI assassinated Abu Bilal, a leader in the ASMB. ISIS then branded ASMB “apostates.” Conflict only escalated from there. The ASMB was pushed to the outskirts of Derna when the MSSI seized much of the town in October 2014. In December 2014, the ASMB, ASL’s branch in Derna, and other Islamist groups joined together as the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC). In June 2015, ISIS assassinated ASMB leader Salim Derby. MSC subsequently vowed to eliminate ISIS and take back control of Derna. In 2018, the group changed its name to the Derna Protection Forces. (Sources: [TRAC](#) [81], [Time](#) [82], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [84], [The Line of Steel](#) [80], [New York Times](#) [8], [Libya Observer](#) [85], [Reuters](#) [9], [Reuters](#) [86])

Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents

Assassinations and Targeted Killings

An “anti-ISIS activist” in Derna claimed in a March 2015 *Newsweek* article that 275 people had been assassinated in the city without follow-up criminal investigation since 2011. Human Rights Watch asserts that dozens of judges, activists, public officials, and members of security forces have been assassinated in Derna in 2014. Most notably in June and July 2014, two prominent women’s rights activists and female politicians were assassinated in Derna and Benghazi. In one 24-hour period in Benghazi, 10 journalists, activists, or members of law enforcement were murdered, a testament to the level of violence pervasive in the country. (Sources: [Newsweek](#) [36], [ReliefWeb](#) [87], [International Business Times](#) [88])

Reporters Without Borders in 2014 ranked Libya as the fifth most deadly country for journalists. With the rise of Islamist militias, violence towards reporters has only increased. In 2014, at least eight journalists were confirmed killed in Libya, including five Libyan journalists found dead outside Benghazi, two Tunisian journalists executed by ISIS, and a Benghazi journalist murdered in his office. In July 2016, Reporters Without Borders asked Libya’s Government of National Accord to take steps to protect journalists after freelance reporter Khaled al-Zantani was allegedly deliberately targeted and killed by an ISIS sniper. Another journalist was killed in Libya in July and a third in October 2016. (Sources: [Reporters Without Borders](#) [89], [Huffington Post](#) [90], [Reuters](#) [91], [All Africa](#) [92], [Reporters Without Borders](#) [93], [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) [94], [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) [95], [Reporters Without Borders](#) [96])

Attacks on Religious Minorities

Libyan militant groups have launched multiple attacks on religious minorities living within the country. Notably, Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) has targeted Sufi Muslims. In August 2012, ASL destroyed a mosque and a Sufi shrine in western Libya, both of which contained tombs of Sufi saints. In April 2015, unidentified militants detonated a bomb outside of a Sufi mosque in Tripoli. The building was destroyed although no one was injured. (Sources: [Foreign Policy](#) [97], [World Bulletin](#) [98])

In February 2015, ISIS released a video showing militants beheading 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians. Following the release, reports emerged that ISIS had kidnapped an additional 35 Egyptian Christians. Later that month, Libyan police discovered the bodies of seven Egyptian Christians shot in the head execution style on a beach outside of Benghazi. No group claimed responsibility for the killings. On April 19, 2015, ISIS released a video of the beheading and shooting of at least 30 Ethiopian Christians. After the release of the video, Meron Estafanos, an Eritrean human rights activist, stated that the video had been edited, claiming that 64 people had been killed, several of them Eritreans. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [99], [New York Times](#) [5], [International Business Times](#) [100])

Previously, Libya had been an extremely popular destination among Egyptian laborers. However, it was reported in late April 2015 that since the release of the February ISIS beheading video, more than 38,000 Egyptians had fled Libya. Some Christian refugees who fled across the Mediterranean from Libya to Europe reported they had to deny their faith in order to avoid execution by ISIS militants. One refugee stated that “hundreds of Christians” had been beheaded or shot for their faith. (Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [99], [New York Times](#) [5], [International Business Times](#) [100], [Reuters](#) [101], [Fox News](#) [102], [Cairo Post](#) [103], [Christian Post](#) [104])

Attacks on Foreign Embassies and Diplomatic Missions

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Since 2011, militant groups have launched multiple terror attacks on embassies within Libya. ISIS militants launched a wave of attacks in spring 2015 targeting nations involved in the U.N.-brokered Libyan peace negotiations. These negotiations sought to reconcile the rival governments based in Tripoli and Tobruk. Sponsored by South Korean U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, the negotiations have been held in Algeria and Morocco. Additionally, the head of the U.N. Support Mission in Libya at the time, Bernardino León, is Spanish. As such, the South Korean, Spanish, Algerian, and Moroccan embassies have been attacked by ISIS militants. The South Korean embassy, the only embassy still staffed (albeit lightly) in the country as of July 2015, was the only embassy to suffer any casualties when two Libyan guards were killed in a shooting. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [105], [Fox News](#) [106], [Reuters](#) [107])

ISIS militants have also bombed the Egyptian and Emirati embassies, likely due to their backing of the Tobruk government, and the Iranian embassy, likely related to its backing of the Assad regime. Additionally, in 2012, in Benghazi, there was an assassination attempt on the British ambassador and an attack on the U.S. consulate. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [105], [Fox News](#) [106], [Reuters](#) [107], [Daily Mail](#) [108])

In January 2017, a U.S. State Department Travel Warning cautioned Americans “against all travel to Libya” and recommended that Americans currently in Libya “depart immediately.” (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [109])

Benghazi U.S. Consulate Attack in 2012

On September 11, 2012, multiple extremist organizations launched a coordinated, premeditated attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi. These extremist groups included [al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb](#) [110] (AQIM), [Ansar al-Sharia in Libya](#) [111] (ASL), Abu Abaydah Ibn Jarah Battalion (UJB), [al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#) [112] (AQAP), al-Qaeda in Iraq (now [ISIS](#) [113]), the Muhammad Jamal Network (MJN), and unaffiliated Gaddafi loyalists. (Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114], [Foreign Policy](#) [115])

Initial reports indicated that the attack was part of a wider protest movement in response to the release of the film, *The Innocence of Muslims*. However, subsequent investigations have revealed that the attack had been planned before the release of the movie. In the aftermath of the attack, eyewitness reports emerged indicating that there were no protests prior to the attack against the U.S. consulate. (Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114], [Foreign Policy](#) [115])

The attacks began just before 10:00 p.m. on September 11, when roughly 150 armed men sealed off major roads leading to the consulate with gun trucks. The assailants descended on the mission armed with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and small arms. The attackers easily scared off five local Libyan guards outside, who were equipped only with baseball bats, and breached the gates of the compound. (Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114], [Foreign Policy](#) [115], [Associated Press](#) [116], [New York Post](#) [117])

The attackers set fire to the consulate’s buildings, including “Villa C,” the main building where Ambassador Christopher Stevens, U.S. Foreign Service Information Management Officer Sean Smith, and a Diplomatic Security (DS) Agent were located. Both Smith and Stevens succumbed to smoke inhalation in the building while the DS agent was able to escape. (Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114], [Foreign Policy](#) [115], [Associated Press](#) [116], [New York Post](#) [117])

At around 11:30 p.m., arms fire forced the small CIA security team to evacuate to the nearby annex. The departure of the security team led to a mass looting of the consulate with more than 100 individuals entering the compound. Soon after, a second attack began on the CIA annex. The attacks on the annex came in multiple waves and included combinations of small arms, mortars, satchel charges, and grenades. The final and most deadly attack came just after 5:00 a.m. when a mortar barrage killed two American security personnel, Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods, and wounded a DS agent and CIA security officer. (Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114], [Foreign Policy](#) [115], [Associated Press](#) [116], [New York Post](#) [117])

Corinthia Hotel Attack

On January 28, 2015, ISIS militants detonated a bomb on a street outside of the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, instantly killing three guards. ISIS militants then rushed into the hotel, taking hostages and firing at employees and guests. Ultimately, two

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of the attackers were killed, a Tunisian and a Sudanese man. The attack claimed the lives of five foreigners, including three people from Tajikistan, one from France, and one American private security contractor, along with five Libyan guards. After the attack, ISIS announced that the attack was in revenge for the death of al-Qaeda leader Abu Anas al-Libi in U.S. custody. (Sources: [CNN](#) [7], [Wall Street Journal](#) [118])

Attacks on the Petroleum Industry

Since 2015, ISIS-affiliated militants have attacked a number of oil facilities in Libya, in an effort to destroy the country's energy sector. Targets of the attacks have included the Mabruk and Bahi oil fields in February 2015; the Darha and Ghani oil fields in March 2015; the Mellitah oil port in July 2015; Es Sider in January 2016 and March 2017; Ras Lanuf, Es Sider, and Zueitina in September 2016. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [119], [New York Times](#) [120], [Wall Street Journal](#) [121])

On February 3, 2015, unidentified militants stormed the Mabruk oil facility south of Sirte, killing and beheading 12. During the attack, one assailant allegedly told the victims that the attack was "your punishment for working with the 'kuffar' [non-Muslims]." Militants stormed the field again on February 13 and March 3. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [119], [Wall Street Journal](#) [121], [Wall Street Journal](#) [122], [Wall Street Journal](#) [123])

On February 13, 2015, militants attacked the Bahi oil facility in central Libya, but failed to inflict any damage. On March 3, unidentified militants again attacked, and ultimately captured, the oil station. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [124], [Reuters](#) [125])

On March 3, 2015, unidentified militants attacked the Dahra oil facility southeast of Tripoli. (Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [123])

In March 2015, ISIS militants attacked the Ghani oil field southeast of Tripoli, reportedly beheading eight security guards and kidnapping nine foreign workers, including an Austrian, a Bangladeshi, a Czech, four Filipinos, and a Ghanaian. (Source: [BBC News](#) [126])

On July 19, 2015, militants kidnapped four Italian foreign workers from the Mellitah oil and gas port, east of Tripoli. (Source: [Guardian](#) [127])

On January 4, 2016, two ISIS militants were killed during a failed attempt to seize oil production facilities at Es Sider. (Source: [BBC News](#) [128], [Wall Street Journal](#) [129], [Washington Times](#) [130])

On January 9, 2016, ISIS militants attacked an oil tanker at Es Sider port. (Source: [Daily Mail](#) [131])

On September 11, 2016, forces loyal to General Khalifa Hifter attacked and seized as many as three major oil fields in eastern Libya. (Source: [New York Times](#) [120]).

On March 15, 2017, the Libyans National Army reclaimed the Es Sider oil port and the Ras Lanuf oil refinery after nearly two weeks of fighting against the Benghazi Defense Brigades, which had captured the locations from the army. (Source: [The National](#) [132])

Militant operations are not the only method extremists have used in order to undermine the country's vital energy sector. In January 2013, militants assassinated a British man and a woman from New Zealand on a beach near an oil and gas plant, both of whom worked in the Libyan oil industry. In February 2015, a bomb detonated on a pipeline from the Libyan El Sarir shut down production at the field, one of the most productive in Libya still in operation. Overall, attacks on the oil industry, which the Libyan government depends on for 90 percent of their revenue, have forced the Libyan National Oil Corporation to declare force majeure at 11 of their oilfields. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [133], [Guardian](#) [134], [Congressional Research Service](#) [135])

Libyan oil production declined from over 1.6 million barrels per day since the start of the 2011 revolution to a reported 260,000 barrels of oil per day in February 2016. Additionally, ISIS militants still hold as of August 2015, at least 10 foreigners captured during oil infrastructure attacks. It was estimated in February 2016 by the head of Libya's national oil company that the country had lost some \$68 billion in oil revenues since 2013. The attacks on Libyan oil infrastructure have also had ripple effects across the world and analysts estimate the increase in the Brent Crude price in spring 2015 was partially due to the instability in Libya. Since late 2016, Libyan oil production has been rising. Since November 2016,

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production has risen 580,000 barrels per day to 700,000. As of January 2017, all of Libya's main terminal were operating and Libya's oil production rose to more than 1 million barrels per day by the end of the year. Nonetheless, attacks have continued into 2018. On June 14, 2018, the Benghazi Defense Brigades attacked Ras Lanuf and Es Sider, causing a production loss of 240,000 barrels per day. (Sources: [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#) [136], [Libya Business News](#) [137], [Reuters](#) [133], [New York Times](#) [138], [Guardian](#) [134], [Congressional Research Service](#) [135], [Business Insider](#) [139], [Reuters](#) [140], [New York Times](#) [141], [CNBC](#) [142], [Atlantic](#) [143], [Resilience.org](#) [144], [Reuters](#) [145])

- **December 10, 2019:**The U.N. Security Council releases a 376-page report prepared by a panel of experts that details the deteriorating security situation in Libya due to an increase in the presence of Chadian and Sudanese fighters throughout the war-torn country.
The influx of foreign fighters primarily support the LNA, as they guard critical infrastructure so that Haftar's troops can carry out offensive operations against the internationally recognized government. Additionally, the panel claims that ISIS will now direct its focus onto Libya, quoting a video in July by an ISIS leader in Libya, Mahmud Massud al-Baraassi. In the video, the report said, "he highlighted that Libya was now one of the main axes of future ISIS operations, which are designed to compensate for the loss of ground" in Syria. Source: [U.S. News](#) [4]
- **November 30, 2019 - December 1, 2019:**Airstrikes target Umm al-Aranib town and Al-Sawani, south-west of central Tripoli.
The late November strike on Umm al-Aranib kills at least 11, and the December 1st strike on Al-Sawani kills three and injures one. The GNA suspects the rival LNA to be responsible for the strikes despite the LNA denying the claims. The strikes mark the latest escalation in an air campaign as the LNA presses its military offensive to retain control over desert areas in the south. Source: [Reuters](#) [146]
- **November 18, 2019:**The GNA accuses the LNA of carrying out a drone attack to the south of Tripoli.
The strike targets a biscuit factory, killing seven people and injuring 15 others. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [147]
- **October 31, 2019:**The LNA launches an air campaign targeting the headquarters of Libya's Interior Ministry in Tripoli.
It is unreported if there were any casualties in the attack. Source: [Xinhua](#) [148]
- **October 23, 2019:**The LNA launches an airstrike in Al Swani, south of Tripoli.
The attack kills two and wounds three others. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [149]
- **October 17, 2019:**Gunmen raid two cafes in Tripoli in an attempt to banish unmarried couples and impose strict religious codes.
The identities of the armed men are not immediately confirmed, but the episode reflects the rise of Islamist currents, including hardline Salafism. Source: [Reuters](#) [150]
- **July 28, 2019:**An airstrike hits a field hospital south of Tripoli.
The strike kills at least 5. It is suspected that the LNA launched the strike. Source: [France 24](#) [151]
- **July 16, 2019:**An airstrike hits a hospital in Swani.
Four people are wounded. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [France 24](#) [151]
- **July 3, 2019:**An airstrike hits a migrant detention center in a suburb of Tripoli.
The strike kills at least 40 and wounds more than 100. Tripoli has accused Haftar and the LNA for the attack. Source: [NPR](#) [152]
- **June 2, 2019:**Two car bombs detonate in Derna, intending to target a military unit in the city.
At least 18 people are wounded. It is suspected that either al-Qaeda or ISIS are behind the attack. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [153]
- **May 29, 2019:**The Libyan National Army extradites high profile terrorist Hesham Ashmawi to Egypt.
Ashmawi, a former Egyptian special forces officer and founder of the Ansar al-Islam network, is convicted of orchestrating multiple attacks against high level figures in Egypt, including a deadly ambush against police in Egypt's Western Desert in 2017. The LNA arrested Ashmawi on October 8, 2018, during a security operation in the northeastern Libyan city of Derna. Sources: [Al Monitor](#) [154], [Ashraq Al-Awsat](#) [155]
- **May 18, 2019:**ISIS militants attack an oil field in Zalla, southern Libya.
The insurgents kill two people and kidnap four others. Zalla contains five major oil fields which is repeatedly attacked by ISIS affiliates. Source: [Xinhua](#) [156]
- **April 11, 2019:**ISIS militants ambush the town of Al-Fuqaha.
The attack kills two, including the town's mayor. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [157]
- **March 26, 2019:**ISIS militiamen attack the city of Ghadwa.
The insurgents kill one person and kidnap three others. The militants also cut off telephone lines in the region. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [158]
- **February 14, 2019:**Militiamen storm the Tunisian consul in Tripoli, holding 14 Tunisian workers hostage.
The militiamen demand that Tunisian authorities release a fellow Libyan militiaman jailed in Tunisia in fulfillment of a 20-year prison sentence over drug trafficking. The hostages are freed by Libyan authorities a week later on February 18. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [159]
- **January 1, 2019:**A suicide bomber blows himself up outside of a police station in Ghadwa.
No casualties are reported. The bombing comes days after forces loyal to military commander Khalifa Haftar, which

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- currently control much of eastern Libya, released 12 ISIS members near Ghadwa. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [160]
- **December 25, 2018:** Suicide attackers storm the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tripoli. The attack kills three people and wounds another 21. ISIS claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161], [France 24](#) [162]
 - **November 30, 2018:** The U.S. military launches an air strike in Libya's southwestern desert. The strike kills 11 suspected members of AQIM. Source: [Middle East Monitor](#) [163]
 - **November 24, 2018:** ISIS fighters attack a police station in the southeastern town of Tazirbu. The attack kills eight police officers. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161]
 - **September 10, 2018:** ISIS fighters attack the offices of the National Oil Corporation in Tripoli. The attack kills two staff members. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161]
 - **August 26, 2018:** Local militias clash with al-Kani tribal fighters from Tarhouna for control in Tripoli, killing at least four and wounding seven during three days of fighting. Both groups are allied with the Government of National Accord. The Libyan government declares a state of emergency. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [164]
 - **August 23, 2018:** Militants attack a border checkpoint outside the town of Zliten, killing at least four. ISIS claims responsibility two days later through its Amaq News Agency. ISIS claims it killed seven and wounded 10, but the group provides no evidence of its claims. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [165], [Reuters](#) [166]
 - **July 24, 2018:** ISIS militants attack a checkpoint east of Ajdabiya, killing two police officers. Source: [Xinhua](#) [167]
 - **July 14, 2018:** Militants attack a control station and kidnap four employees at the Sharara oil field, the largest in Libya. Two of the employees are released soon after. The attackers are reportedly from an unknown militant group. Sources: [Reuters](#) [168], [Reuters](#) [169]
 - **July 6, 2018 - July 7, 2018:** On August 6, militants attack al-Hassouna water treatment facility in northern Libya, kidnapping three foreign workers and killing another. Separately, ISIS claims through its Al Naba propaganda magazine that it had captured two air force officers loyal to General Khalifa Haftar. On August 7, militants attack the water facility in Tazirbu, kidnapping two workers and killing two others. Authorities suspect ISIS in both water facility attacks but there are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [170]
 - **May 24, 2018:** A car bomb explodes behind the Tibesti hotel in Benghazi, killing at least seven and wounding 10. Source: [Reuters](#) [171]
 - **May 22, 2018:** A car bomb explodes at a checkpoint outside of Ajdabiya, killing two of Haftar's soldiers and wounding two. ISIS claims responsibility. Separately, militants attack a checkpoint in Awjila and capture a police officer. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [172], [Anadolu Agency](#) [173]
 - **May 8, 2018:** An ISIS suicide car bomber explodes at a security checkpoint east of Sirte, killing two and wounding four. Police disarm a second bomb before it explodes. Sources: [Reuters](#) [174], [Xinhua](#) [175]
 - **May 1, 2018:** Suicide bombers attack the electoral commission office in Tripoli. The bombers engage in a gun battle with security forces upon entering the office before setting off their explosives, killing at least 12 and wounding seven. ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency hours later, stating that two suicide bombers killed at least 15 people. Sources: [Washington Post](#) [176], [Reuters](#) [177]
 - **March 29, 2018:** A car bomb explodes at a checkpoint south of the Libyan town of Ajdabiya, killing at least six and wounding nine, according to medical sources. ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency and claims the bombing killed at least 14 of Haftar's troops. Source: [Reuters](#) [178]
 - **March 9, 2018:** An ISIS car bomb at a checkpoint near the town of Ajdabiya kills at least three and wounds three. Sources: [Libya Observer](#) [179], [Associated Press](#) [180]
 - **February 9, 2018:** Twin bombs explode at a mosque in Benghazi, killing at least two and wounding 75. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [181], [Reuters](#) [182]
 - **January 23, 2018:** Twin car bombs explode near a mosque in Benghazi, killing at least 35 and wounding 45. The second bomb explodes after emergency units arrive to care for the injured. There are no immediate claims of responsibility, but authorities suspect ISIS. Sources: [Reuters](#) [183], [Reuters](#) [184], [Associated Press](#) [185]
 - **December 17, 2017:** Misrata Mayor Mohamed Eshtewi is shot and killed when unidentified gunmen ambush his car after he returns to Misrata from Turkey. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [186]
 - **October 25, 2017:** Armed ISIS militants in a dozen vehicles attack a military checkpoint south of Ajdabiya, killing two and wounding three. Source: [Reuters](#) [187]
 - **October 4, 2017:** Gunmen attack a court complex in Misrata with Kalashnikovs before blowing themselves up, killing at least four and wounding 39. ISIS claims responsibility through its Amaq News Agency, claiming it targeted "one of the most prominent strongholds" of the Government of National Accord. Source: [Reuters](#) [188]

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- **August 2017:**A car bomb at a security checkpoint in Nawfiliya kills four soldiers loyal to Haftar. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [189]
- **August 23, 2017:**Militants attack a security checkpoint in the al-Jufra district and behead 11, including two civilians and nine soldiers loyal to General Khalifa Haftar. There are no immediate claims of responsibility but Haftar's forces blame ISIS. Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [190], [Fox News](#) [191]
- **June 28, 2017:**A convoy belonging to the U.N. Support Mission in Libya is attacked by unknown gunmen near Zawiyah city, 50 kilometers west of Tripoli, resulting in no casualties. Source: [Xinhua](#) [192]
- **June 20, 2017:**A suicide car bomber detonates his explosives prematurely, killing only himself. The explosion occurs a few kilometers from the large oil port of Es Sider in northern Libya. Sources: [Express](#) [193], [Reuters](#) [194]
- **May 19, 2017:**A tribal leader loyal to LNA General Haftar and five other people, including a child, are killed in a car bombing outside a mosque in the eastern city of Slouq. Twenty-six people are wounded. Sources: [Guardian](#) [41], [Reuters](#) [195]
- **February 22, 2017:**Benghazi security chief Saleh Hweidi is wounded when his motorcade is targeted by a car bomb in Benghazi. The second car bomb attack in a month targeting political leaders creates concern of a return to assassinations that plagued Benghazi in 2014. Sources: [Libya Herald](#) [196], [Libya Herald](#) [197]
- **February 20, 2017:**Gunmen open fire on a convoy carrying the prime minister of the U.N.-backed Government of National Accord and two other senior officials in Tripoli. No injuries are reported. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [198], [Times of Islamabad](#) [199]
- **January 22, 2017:**A car bomb explodes in the center of Tripoli, some 350 meters from the recently reopened Italian embassy and also in close proximity to the Ministry of Planning and the Egyptian embassy, killing two persons. Source: [Reuters](#) [200]
- **December 23, 2016:**Two hijackers seize control of Afriqiyah Airways Airbus A320 while it is en route from the central Libyan city of Sabha to Tripoli. The hijackers are apparently members of a pro-Gaddafi group, seeking political asylum in Europe. The two men allegedly threaten to detonate homemade grenades and force the plane to land at Malta's International Airport. Following an hours-long standoff with Maltese authorities, the hijackers surrender and release all passengers and crew. Sources: [Times of Malta](#) [201], [Wall Street Journal](#) [202]
- **December 18, 2016:**A suicide bomber explodes in the Ganfouda area near Benghazi, killing eight Libyan soldiers. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [Associated Press](#) [203]
- **December 2, 2016:**Several female suicide bombers kill four Libyans soldiers and two other women in Sirte. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [204]
- **November 27, 2016:**U.S. intelligence officials claim a French airstrike conducted in southern Libya targeted senior al-Qaeda leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [205]
- **November 15, 2016:**An airstrike in Libya's southwestern city of Sabha kills at least seven Islamist militants. Libyan news outlets claim the strikes targeted senior al-Qaeda leader Abdulrahman Belhaj Hesnawi, but government officials are unable to verify his death. Sources: [Reuters](#) [206], [Military Times](#) [207]
- **November 15, 2016:**A car bomb targeting a military funeral explodes in Benghazi, killing one soldier and wounding 14 others. Source: [Libya Herald](#) [208]
- **October 29, 2016:**A car explodes after being hit by a missile in Benghazi's Kisha Square, killing four civilians, including the head of the Libyan Anti-Corruption Organization, Mohammad Boukaiqis. Thirteen others are injured. There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [204]
- **September 7, 2016:**Four fighters aligned with Libya National Army are killed by a land mine in western Derna. ISIS claims responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [204]
- **August 18, 2016:**ISIS suicide attackers detonate two car bombs near pro-government troops in the former ISIS stronghold of Sirte, killing at least 10 and wounding 20 others. After the attack, pro-government forces launch a raid into a residential neighborhood of the city, killing three alleged ISIS members. Source: [Independent](#) [209]
- **August 2, 2016:**A car bomb targeting Libyan security forces explodes in the Guwarsha district of Benghazi. The attack reportedly kills 22 people and wounds 20 others. The Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, an alliance comprised of Islamist groups including Ansar al-Sharia Libya, claims responsibility. Sources: [Reuters](#) [210], [BBC News](#) [211]
- **July 22, 2016:**Libyan forces reportedly discover 14 unidentified bodies with gunshot wounds to the head in Benghazi. Authorities believe the individuals were executed. Source: [Reuters](#) [212]
- **July 21, 2016:**Suspected ISIS fighters in Sirte exchange fire with Libyan forces, killing 13 militants and wounding an additional 110 others.

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- Source: [Reuters](#) [212]
- **July 11, 2016:**Libyan forces reportedly discover a mass grave containing seven bodies in the ISIS stronghold of Sirte. Source: [Daily Mail](#) [213]
 - **June 22, 2016:**Suspected ISIS fighters kill at least 30 pro-government fighters near Sirte. Source: [BBC News](#) [214]
 - **June 12, 2016:**A suicide bomber detonates inside a field hospital for soldiers fighting ISIS near Sirte, killing three people and wounding seven others. Source: [Reuters](#) [215]
 - **June 11, 2016:**ISIS fighters reportedly kill two soldiers and wound eight others with gunshots and mortars as Libyan forces retake the port in the ISIS-controlled city of Sirte. Source: [BBC News](#) [216]
 - **May 30, 2016:**Suspected ISIS fighters kill five soldiers and wound 18 others as Libyan forces attempt liberate the coastal town of Bin Jawad from the terror group. Source: [Newsweek](#) [217]
 - **April 15, 2016:**Two ISIS suicide bombers attack Libyan security forces in Benghazi, killing at least 15 soldiers and wounding another 40. Source: [TRTWorld](#) [218]
 - **April 13, 2016:**An ISIS suicide bomber reportedly kills a member of the Libyan security forces and wounds another four near the Essdada checkpoint. The checkpoint is located approximately 80 kilometers south of the western Libyan city of Misrata. Sources: [Reuters](#) [219], [Libya Observer](#) [220]
 - **April 2, 2016:**Suspected ISIS militants attempt to attack the Bayda oil field in eastern Libya. Two guards are killed. Source: [Reuters](#) [221]
 - **March 7, 2016:**Dozens of suspected ISIS members cross the Libyan border into Tunisia and launch attacks on police and army posts in the border town of Ben Gardane. At least 10 security personnel and seven civilians are killed. Sources: [Financial Times](#) [222], [Al Jazeera](#) [223]
 - **February 24, 2016:**After storming a Libyan security headquarters in Sabratha, Libya, ISIS affiliates kill and behead 12 security officers. Source: [CBS News](#) [224]
 - **January 21, 2016:**ISIS militants set fire to oil storage tanks at the Ras Lanuf oil terminal in northern Libya. Source: [Reuters](#) [225]
 - **January 11, 2016:**ISIS fighters launch a failed maritime assault in northern Libya. Libyan guards were able to fend off ISIS's three boats looking to attack the Zueitina oil terminal. Source: [Agence France-Presse](#) [226]
 - **January 9, 2016:**A major power plant in Benghazi is attacked by suspected ISIS militants. Source: [Daily Mail](#) [131]
 - **January 7, 2016:**At least 65 civilians are killed and 100 injured in an ISIS truck bombing of the al-Jahfal training facility in Zliten, 100 miles from Tripoli. It is the most lethal terrorist attack since the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [227], [Reuters](#) [228], [Express](#) [229]
 - **January 6, 2016:**ISIS forces advance across eastern Libya, threatening to take control of several oil ports and tankers. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [230]
 - **January 4, 2016:**ISIS fighters attack an oil tank near Libya's third largest port, Ras Lanuf. The attack leaves seven guards dead and another 25 wounded. Sources: [Reuters](#) [231], [International Business Times](#) [232]
 - **December 17, 2015:**Representatives of Libya's rival parliaments sign a United Nations-brokered agreement in Morocco to form a national unity government. Source: [New York Times](#) [13]
 - **November 26, 2015:**Four men allegedly tied to Salafists are killed in the northeastern town of Ajdabiya, purportedly for their opposition to ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. No group claims responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]
 - **November 6, 2015:**Anti-ISIS preacher Faraj al-Oraibi is killed while leaving his mosque in the northeastern Libyan town of Ajdabiya. No group claims responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]
 - **October 29, 2015:**ISIS assassinate the outspoken, anti-ISIS preacher Sheikh Suleiman Kabylie by detonating a bomb under his car. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]
 - **October 23, 2015:**A political demonstration in opposition of the proposed U.N.-backed unity government is attacked, killing 12 protestors and wounding 39 others in Benghazi. No group claims responsibility. Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233], [Reuters](#) [234]
 - **October 18, 2015:**ISIS publishes a video depicting the execution of a Christian man from South Sudan. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]

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- **October 16, 2015:** ISIS beheads two Libyan men accused of sorcery in Sirte.
Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]
- **August 12, 2015:** ISIS militants kill Sheikh Khalid Ben Rajah, the imam of a local mosque in Sirte. A local revolt against ISIS ensues, leading ISIS to kill at least 20 members of the revolt. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [233]
- **July 19, 2015:** Militants kidnap four Italian foreign workers from the Mellitah oil and gas port, east of Tripoli.
Source: [Guardian](#) [127]
- **July 18, 2015:** ISIS militants kidnap three foreign Christians from the group's stronghold in Sirte. According to passports published by the terrorist group, its victims had come to Libya from Egypt, Nigeria, and Ghana.
Source: [Reuters](#) [235]
- **June 26, 2015:** Tunisian gunman Seifeddine Rezgui kills 38 in an attack at a hotel in Sousse, Tunisia. Prior to the attack, Rezgui had reportedly trained in an ISIS militant camp in Libya. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [236], [Guardian](#) [127]
- **June 9, 2015:** ISIS militants kidnap 88 Eritrean Christians from a human trafficking convoy in Libya.
Source: [Fox News](#) [102]
- **June 1, 2015:** A Tunisian ISIS suicide bomber detonates his explosives at a Libya Dawn checkpoint outside Misrata, killing five and wounding eight.
Source: [Malaysian Insider](#) [237]
- **May 31, 2015:** A suicide bomber detonates a car at a checkpoint west of Misurata, killing at least four.
Source: [New York Times](#) [238]
- **May 21, 2015:** An ISIS suicide car bombing kills two soldiers at a checkpoint in Misrata loyal to the General National Congress.
Source: [Al-Arabiya](#) [239]
- **May 21, 2015:** Amidst a renewed offensive by General Khalifa Haftar to retake Benghazi from Islamist forces, a total of 19 soldiers are killed over a 24-hour period.
Source: [Al-Arabiya](#) [239]
- **April 27, 2015:** Tobruk-affiliated security forces discover the bodies of five Libyan journalists in the Green Mountains, east of Benghazi.
The journalists were seized at a militant checkpoint in August, while reporting on the inauguration of the Tobruk-based parliament. ISIS fighters subsequently beheaded the reporters, four Libyans and one Egyptian. Source: [Reuters](#) [91]
- **April 21, 2015:** In Benghazi, unidentified gunmen murder Muftah Al-Qatrani, a reporter who supported the Tobruk-based government and was documenting Operation Dignity, General Khalifa Haftar's counterterrorism and counter-extremism operations.
Source: [AllAfrica](#) [92]
- **April 21, 2015:** ISIS detonates a bomb outside of the Spanish embassy in Tripoli. No injuries are reported and the embassy had been closed since summer of 2014. Source: [International Business Times](#) [105]
- **April 19, 2015:** ISIS releases a video of its militants executing two groups of Christians in Libya. The executions take place on a beach in Eastern Libya and in the desert in Southern Libya. Half are beheaded, the rest shot. The Ethiopian government acknowledged that 30 Ethiopian citizens were killed in the video. Later, activists claim 64 people were executed, including some Eritreans. Source: [New York Times](#) [5]
- **April 13, 2015:** ISIS detonates a bomb outside the Moroccan embassy in Tripoli. No injuries are reported. Source: [Fox News](#) [106]
- **April 12, 2015:** ISIS gunmen open fire on the South Korean embassy in Tripoli, killing two Libyan guards and wounding another.
The embassy was lightly staffed. Source: [Reuters](#) [107]
- **April 9, 2015:** Militants bomb the Sufi al-Quds mosque in Tripoli. No casualties are reported, but the mosque is heavily damaged. Source: [World Bulletin](#) [98]
- **April 5, 2015:** An ISIS suicide bombing, carried out by a Sudanese recruit, kills four and wounds 21 at a Libya Dawn checkpoint in Misrata.
Source: [Al-Arabiya](#) [240]
- **April 3, 2015:** An ISIS raid on a Libya Dawn checkpoint near Misrata kills seven militiamen.
Source: [Daily Star](#) [241]
- **March 24, 2015:** ISIS releases two Bangladeshi workers captured at the al-Ghani oil field after they confirm the workers are Muslims.
Source: [Daily Star](#) [242]
- **March 24, 2015:** Libyan forces accuse ASL of launching a suicide bombing against an army checkpoint in Benghazi, killing seven.
Source: [Yahoo News](#) [243]
- **March 19, 2015:** ASL releases photographs showing 14 graduates of an ASL training camp in or near Benghazi. The photos show the uniformed fighters training in small arms, in hand to hand combat, and studying in a classroom setting. Source: [Long War Journal](#) [244]

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- **March 6, 2015:**Five ISIS militants attack the Libyan al-Ghani oil field, beheading 11 Libyan guards and taking nine foreigners hostage. The hostages include four Filipinos, two Bangladeshis, one Ghanaian, one Austrian, and one Czech. No demands are made. Source: [Reuters](#) [140]
- **March 4, 2015:**ISIS affiliated militants briefly seize the Dahra oilfield south of Sirte. Nine guards are killed in the assault and others are forced to withdraw after running out of ammunition. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [123]
- **February 24, 2015:**Libyan police discover the bodies of seven Egyptian Christians shot in the head execution style on a beach outside of Benghazi. No group claims responsibility for the killings. Source: [Reuters](#) [101]
- **February 22, 2015:**ISIS detonates two bombs outside of Iranian diplomatic complex in Tripoli. No injuries are reported as the mission was evacuated in 2012. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [245]
- **February 21, 2015:**Three simultaneous ISIS bombings, on a gas station, local security headquarters, and the private home of a member of parliament, kill 55 people in the Tripoli controlled city of al-Quba. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [246], [Voice of America](#) [247]
- **February 16, 2015:**Thirty-five Egyptian Coptic Christians are kidnapped in areas controlled by ASL and ISIS. The kidnappings follow an Egyptian bombing raid against ISIS bases in Libya in response to the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians. Source: [International Business Times](#) [100]
- **February 15, 2015:**ISIS releases a video depicting the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians. The Egyptians were workers kidnapped in two raids in the eastern Libyan city of Sirte. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [99]
- **February 14, 2015:**Gunmen from an “al-Qaeda inspired militia” seize radio and television stations in Sirte, Libya. An anonymous resident reported that the station began to play religious songs and lessons. Earlier that week, militants from ASL had “warned the station to stop broadcasting music.” Source: [New York Times](#) [248]
- **February 14, 2015:**A bomb is detonated on the pipeline from the Libyan El Sarir oil field. The attack forces a shutdown of the field, one of the largest still in operation and pumping roughly 180,000 barrels per day prior to the attack. Sources: [Reuters](#) [133], [Business Insider](#) [139]
- **February 4, 2015:**Unknown attackers behead, shoot, and kill 12 and abduct seven people in an attack on the Mabruk oil field, 100 miles south of Sirte. Two Filipinos and two Ghanaians are among those killed and three Filipinos are confirmed to be among those captured. Fighters simultaneously seized the al-Bahi oil field. No casualties or abductions were reported. Source: [Reuters](#) [249]
- **January 27, 2015:**ISIS militants kill 10 civilians in an attack on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli. Five Libyans were killed, including two Libyan security personnel, along with five foreigners, including three Tajiks, an American, and a Frenchman. Source: [CNN](#) [7]
- **January 26, 2015:**Libyan army forces accuse ASL of firing rockets on residential buildings in Benghazi, killing six and wounding 20. Source: [Times of Malta](#) [250]
- **January 17, 2015:**ISIS militants detonate a bomb outside of the Algerian embassy in Tripoli. Two guards and a pedestrian are injured. Source: [IHS Jane’s 360](#) [251]
- **January 8, 2015:**ISIS Barqa province publishes photos of the execution of two Tunisian journalists, Sofiene Chourabi and Nadhir Ktari, captured in Libya in September. Source: [Huffington Post](#) [90]
- **December 30, 2014:**A car bomb detonates outside of the Tobruk hotel where the Council of Deputies is meeting. Three lawmakers and eight hotel staff are injured in the bombing. Source: [Reuters](#) [252]
- **December 29, 2014:**ASL releases a video showcasing captured tanks and heavy weapons it acquired after raiding one of General Khalifa Haftar’s camps on December 26, 2014. The video includes two ASL leaders, Wissam Bin Hamid and Mohammad al-Darsi. Source: [Long War Journal](#) [253]
- **December 27, 2014:**ISIS militants detonate a car bomb in front of the headquarters of the General Directorate for the Protection of Diplomatic Missions in Tripoli. No casualties are reported, but ISIS declared its intentions to execute similar attacks in the future. Source: [Shanghai Daily](#) [254]
- **November 13, 2014:**Car bombs are detonated outside of the Egyptian and UAE embassies in Tripoli. Two guards outside of the Egyptian embassy were wounded. UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan reports the embassy was “badly damaged” and three guards were wounded. Both embassies had been evacuated the previous spring. Al-Nahyan blames the attack on Fajr Libya and Ansar al-Sharia. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [255]
- **November 12, 2014:**Four simultaneous bombings kill five and injure 21 across Libya. First, two bombs are detonated in Tobruk near the hotel where the Council of Deputies was meeting, killing one and injuring 21. Then, a bomb explodes near the Labraq military airport east of Benghazi killing four. A third attack strikes Benghazi. A bomb explodes but no casualties were reported. Source: [Associated Press](#) [256]
- **October 8, 2014:**Unidentified gunmen in Benghazi gun down Moatasem Billah Werfali, a freelance journalist and radio presenter. Source: [UNESCO](#) [257]
- **October 5, 2014:**Unidentified gunmen murder Tayeb Issa Hamouda in Ubari, a city in southern Libya.

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- Hamouda had founded *Tuareg Tumsat*, a Tuareg cultural satellite TV channel. Source: [UNESCO](#) [257]
- **October 3, 2014:** Multiple suicide bombings carried out by the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council, Libya Shield, and Ansar al-Sharia, kill at least 40 Libyan soldiers and wound dozens more in Benghazi. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [258]
 - **September 19, 2014:** Libyan journalist Tawfiq Ben Saud is killed, along with a friend, in a drive by shooting in Benghazi. The reporter had received a number of threats and had been included on an assassination list drafted by the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries. Source: [Reporters Without Borders](#) [259]
 - **September 15, 2014:** At least 19 are killed in a violent, 24-hour clash between General Haftar's forces and ASL in Benghazi. Source: [Middle East Eye](#) [260]
 - **July 30, 2014:** ASL announces that it has seized all of Benghazi and declares the city an "Islamic Emirate." More than 60 people are killed in the previous week's fighting. Sources: [Al-Arabiya](#) [261], [Yahoo News](#) [262]
 - **July 24, 2014:** ASL overruns two bases in Benghazi, capturing weapons, ammunition, and military vehicles. Source: [IHS Jane's 360](#) [263]
 - **July 18, 2014:** In Derna, unidentified gunmen kill women's rights campaigner and former Libyan congresswoman Fariha Barkawi. Source: [ReliefWeb](#) [87]
 - **June 25, 2014:** Unknown assassins murder Salwa Boughaigis, a female political activist, after she votes in Benghazi. Source: [ReliefWeb](#) [87]
 - **June 20, 2014:** The Islamist groups of Benghazi join together as the "Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries." The coalition includes ASL, Libya Shield 1, the Brega Martyrs Brigade, the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade, and the February 17th Martyrs Brigade. Source: [Yahoo News](#) [264]
 - **June 2, 2014:** ASL launches a counterattack against General Haftar's "Operation Dignity" campaign against ASL and other Islamist militias. Eighteen people are killed and more than seventy wounded in the heaviest fighting since the start of Operation Dignity. Source: [Deutsche Welle](#) [265]
 - **January 3, 2014:** A British man and a woman from New Zealand are discovered shot in the head execution style on a beach near an oil and gas plant 60 miles west of Tripoli. Their car, parked nearby, was not broken into, suggesting the crime was not a robbery and likely was terror motivated. Both were employed by Blue Energy, a firm that maintains oilfields. Source: [Guardian](#) [134]
 - **December 5, 2013:** An American teacher, Ronald Smith, who taught at the Benghazi International School, is shot and killed in Benghazi while out jogging. No group claimed responsibility for the attack. Source: [USA Today](#) [266]
 - **August 25, 2012:** ASB militants deploy an excavator to central Tripoli to destroy the Sidi Al-Sha'ab mosque, which contains the tomb of a Sufi saint. Source: [Foreign Policy](#) [97]
 - **August 24, 2012:** Ansar al-Sharia Benghazi militants attack a Sufi shrine in Zliten, destroying the tomb of 15th century Sufi scholar Abdel Salam al-Asmar and burning a mosque library. Source: [Foreign Policy](#) [97]
 - **September 11, 2012:** Individuals affiliated with terrorist groups, including AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia, AQAP, and the Mohammad Jamal Network, participate in a coordinated attack against the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, killing U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. personnel. Source: [U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence](#) [114]
 - **June 11, 2012:** The British ambassador is unhurt, but two security officers are injured, after an RPG strikes his convoy in Benghazi. No group claims responsibility. Source: [Daily Mail](#) [108]
 - **June 6, 2012:** Militants in the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Rahman Brigade detonate an IED on the wall of the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, creating a hole that was, as described by one individual, "big enough for forty men to pass through." The attack was reportedly in revenge for the U.S. drone strike killing of al-Qaeda leader Abu Yahya al-Libi. Sources: [U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform](#) [267], [CNN](#) [268]
 - **March 3, 2012:** In a video posted online, 30 armed militiamen desecrate the graves of commonwealth soldiers in a cemetery near Benghazi. Two cemeteries are vandalized near the city and in one cemetery more than 200 graves are defaced. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Guardian](#) [269]
 - **July 28, 2011:** Islamist militants assassinate rebel commander Abdul Fattah Younes, a previous minister in the Gaddafi government who had led a crackdown on Islamists in Libya. Source: [New York Times](#) [270]
 - **September 19, 1989:** A bomb constructed by Libyan intelligence explodes in the cargo hold of Flight UTA 772 over Niger killing 170 people.

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Source: [Crowell & Moring](#) [271]

- **December 21, 1988:**A bomb constructed by Libyan intelligence explodes in the cargo hold of flight Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people on board the aircraft and another 11 on the ground. Source: [News.com.au](#) [272].
- **April 15, 1986:**The Libyan government organizes a bombing of a disco in West Berlin popular with American soldiers. The bombing kills three and wounds another 229. Source: [New York Times](#) [273]
- **April 17, 1984:**An unidentified gunman shoots and kills a British policewoman from the first floor of the Libyan embassy. Source: [Guardian](#) [274]

Domestic Counter-Extremism

Libya lacks a comprehensive counterterrorism law, although the Libyan penal code criminalizes offenses that may threaten national security, including terrorism, the promotion of terrorist acts, and the handling of money in support of such acts. Libya has ratified the African Union's (AU) Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which requires states to criminalize terrorist acts under their national laws. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161])

The GNA conducted consultations to develop a counterterrorism strategy, including a planning conference supported by the United Kingdom and the European Union, but had not passed any legislation by the end of 2018. A multitude of organizations under the GNA claimed counterterrorism responsibilities, such as the Counterterrorism Unit, the Counterterrorism Task Force (CTTF), the Central Investigations Division, the General Investigations Division, and the Libyan Intelligence Service. However, Libyan law enforcement personnel lacked clear mandates and the capacity to detect, deter, respond to, or investigate terrorist incidents because of continued political and security force fragmentation. In many parts of Libya, armed groups, rather than state institutions, provide security and law enforcement functions, including detaining terrorist elements. The CTTF has begun efforts to work with foreign partner forces to train and build capacity to counter terrorist activity in Tripoli and areas around Misrata. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161])

The Libyan government lacked a comprehensive border management strategy and was unable to secure the country's thousands of miles of land and maritime borders, enabling the illicit flow of fuel, goods, weapons, antiquities, narcotics, migrants, and foreign fighters that pose serious security challenges to the region. The GNA has requested international support to enhance its border security capacity and has participated in discussions with its southern neighbors to improve security and monitoring along Libya's southern borders. Security at Libya's airports is minimal, with limited use of Passenger Name Records (PNR) systems or biometric technology. Libya, however, is working with the U.S. Department of State to enhance security measures, to include biometric screening, at Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport. However, Libya continues to lack the resources, manpower, and training to conduct sufficient maritime patrols to interdict or dissuade illicit maritime trafficking and irregular migration, although Italy and the European Union worked with the Libyan Naval Coastguard to increase the effectiveness of the organization, including command and control. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161])

Libyan National Army

On April 4, 2019, General Khalifa Haftar ordered his Libyan National Army (LNA) to advance on Tripoli, where the internationally recognized government, the GNA, is based. The LNA says its aim is to restore security and fight armed gangs and "terrorism." The push comes months after the LNA made advances elsewhere in Libya. The offensive by Haftar, who has his powerbase in the east of the country where he is allied to a rival government, comes amidst U.N.-led plans for talks to help facilitate the delayed general elections which were to be held last year. Hours after the LNA advanced on Tripoli, the GNA and its affiliated militias, launched a counter-attack against the LNA. However, a week later, a disconcerting group of GNA supporters joined the fight against Haftar, raising new questions for the United States and other Western powers that have condemned Haftar's attack. Among the GNA's questionable bedfellows is the warlord Salah Badi, who has previously allied with Islamist extremists and who is under U.N. sanctions for undermining stability. Also joining the fray is Brigade Defend Benghazi, which largely absorbed an earlier coalition that included a militia under U.N. sanctions as a terrorist organization. That mix so alarms Western powers that some may deem Haftar the lesser evil. The assault on Tripoli has threatened to plunge Libya back into full-scale civil war and possibly create an opening for the country's branch of ISIS. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [275], [New York Times](#) [276], [New York Times](#) [277])

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On April 12, 2019, Haftar declared war on the country's U.N.-backed interim leader of the GNA, Fayeze Serraj, issuing a warrant for his arrest on "terrorism" charges as well as hammering the country's capital with airstrikes. Haftar's spokesperson Ahmed al-Mismari accused Serraj and 22 others of "committing crimes or supporting terrorism in Libya." Accordingly, Serraj accused Haftar, who has bombed the capital's sole functioning civilian airport, of war crimes and vowed to refer his alleged abuses to the International Criminal Court. According to U.N. investigators and analysts, for years, Haftar had the financial and military support of France, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and possibly Saudi Arabia as he fought against Islamist militias in the country's east. All of these countries have abetted Haftar despite his authoritarian leanings because they view him as the best option for stability in a country that has been ravaged for years by civil war and chaos. Furthermore, on June 28, 2019, Libyan government fighters discovered a cache of powerful American missiles at a captured rebel base in the mountains south of Tripoli. The four Javelin anti-tank missiles, which were originally sold to the United Arab Emirates, had ended up bolstering the arsenal of Haftar. (Sources: [Independent \[278\]](#), [Washington Post \[279\]](#), [New York Times \[280\]](#))

Libya and Its Neighbors

On May 26, 2017, ISIS-affiliated extremists ambushed a convoy of buses carrying Coptic Christians to the Saint Samuel Monastery, located outside Minya city, about 200 kilometers south of Cairo, killing 29, including many children. In response, Egypt launched six air strikes on camps near Derna, Libya, where the terrorists are believed to have trained. (Sources: [Al Jazeera \[281\]](#), [Al Jazeera \[282\]](#), [Guardian \[283\]](#))

Following the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by ISIS in February 2015, Egypt launched airstrikes against the group in Libya. The operations targeted ISIS training camps and weapons caches in Derna and Sirte, killing 64 ISIS fighters, including three members of its local leadership. (Sources: [Guardian \[284\]](#), [International Business Times \[285\]](#))

Six audio recordings [leaked \[286\]](#) in May 2015 revealed that Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are secretly arming the internationally-recognized Tobruk government to aid their fight against Libya's militias. These audio recordings confirmed that Egyptian and Emirati aid was being sent to Libya. A [leaked \[287\]](#) document in September 2014 also detailed requests from Libyan officials to their Egyptian counterparts for specific arms and munitions. (Sources: [Middle East Eye \[287\]](#), [Al-Monitor \[288\]](#), [Al Jazeera \[286\]](#))

In May 2016, Tunisia and Libya announced unspecified coordination against terrorism during a visit by Libya's Government of National Accord Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj to Tunisia. (Source: [Agence France-Presse \[289\]](#))

On January 5, 2017, the government of Chad announced it had closed its border with Libya due to the threat of "potential terrorist infiltration" and was boosting its military presence in areas bordering Libya. The Chad government said some terrorists were beginning to gather in the south of Libya, putting Chad's northern border at risk of infiltration. (Source: [ENCA.com \[290\]](#))

The United States and Libya

The United States has launched numerous operations that targeted key leaders of terror groups in Libya since 2011. In October 2013, U.S. Special Forces captured Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai, also known as Abu Anas al-Libi, for his alleged role in the 1998 Kenya and Tanzania U.S. embassy bombings. (Source: [CBS News \[291\]](#))

In June 2014, U.S. Special Forces captured Ahmed Abu Khattala at his residence in Benghazi. Abu Khattala was wanted for his role in the 2012 Benghazi U.S. consulate attack. The U.S. State Department referred to him as a "senior leader" in ASL's branch in Benghazi. Abu Khattala was also designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist on January 20, 2014. (Sources: [Washington Post \[292\]](#), [U.S. State Department \[293\]](#))

In June 2015, the Libyan government reported that a U.S. airstrike had killed Mokhtar Belmokhtar, leader of the al-Qaeda-aligned al-Mourabitoun terror group, outside of the northeastern Libyan town of Ajdabiya. Belmokhtar and his group claimed responsibility for what is considered one of the worst international hostage crises in decades, a four-day siege on Algeria's In Amenas gas plant. The attack resulted in the death of 38 hostages, include 37 foreigners. Belmokhtar reportedly survived the 2015 airstrike. (Sources: [BBC News \[294\]](#), [Middle East Eye \[295\]](#))

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In November 2015, the United States launched its first airstrike against a Libyan ISIS target in the port city of Derna. Abu Nabil, an ISIS leader and spokesman, and several of his associates were killed in the strike.

With the rise of ISIS in Libya, the U.S. has increased their surveillance of the country and has been launching frequent flights of drones and planes from Italy. It has stepped up airstrikes since ISIS in Libya established itself as the most powerful ISIS affiliate outside of Syria and Iraq. Head of the U.S. House Intelligence Committee Congressman Devin Nunes explained that “the jihadist threat emanating from Syria and Iraq cannot be defused without addressing the growing anger posed by the terror group’s co-conspirators in Libya.” On February 19, 2016, U.S. forces conducted airstrikes against an ISIS training camp in Sabratha, Libya. Over 40 militants were killed in the strike. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [296], [New York Times](#) [297], [Military Times](#) [298], [New York Times](#) [299])

The United States launched a new round of airstrikes in Operation Odyssey Lightning, targeting ISIS’s stronghold in Sirte on August 1, 2016. President Barack Obama approved the strikes against the coastal city after Libya’s U.N.-backed unity government requested air support in its fight against ISIS. According to Pentagon spokesperson Peter Cook, U.S. airstrikes enables the unity government, known as the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), “to make a decisive, strategic advance” against ISIS in Sirte. The U.S. airstrikes continued into the second week of August, to assist the pro-government force’s advance against the terror group, according to the Pentagon. According to the U.S. Department of State, GNA-aligned forces, in 2016, demonstrated that they could be a “capable partner” for the U.S. in fighting ISIS because they had “cooperated consistently and productively.” (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [26], [CNN](#) [300], [Washington Post](#) [18], [New York Times](#) [301], [Daily Beast](#) [302], [U.S. Department of State](#) [204])

The airstrikes come at a crucial point in Libya’s efforts to quash ISIS. On May 12, 2016, the Libyan unity government in coordination with pro-government militias launched a major offensive against ISIS in Sirte. By October 2016, pro-government forces captured most the city from ISIS, leaving a few hundred militants backed into a single street in northern Sirte. On December 5, 2016, Libyan officials announced that the pro-government forces officially seized full control of the Sirte from the terror group. The U.S. military officially ended its operations in the city on December 21, 2016. The air campaign consisted of a total of 495 airstrikes throughout Sirte. On January 18, 2017, former U.S. President Barack Obama authorized additional airstrikes on two ISIS training camps approximately 30 miles south of Sirte. The airstrikes killed more than 80 militants. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [303], [Newsweek](#) [217], [BBC News](#) [216], [New York Times](#) [297], [Wall Street Journal](#) [26], [Guardian](#) [24], [Deutsche Welle](#) [27], [New York Times](#) [304], [Al Arabiya](#) [23])

U.S. President Donald Trump launched his administration’s first airstrikes on terrorist targets in Libya on September 24, 2017. “In coordination with Libya’s Government of National Accord and allied forces,” U.S. unmanned military aircraft conducted six “precision” strikes against an ISIS desert camp in Libya, according to U.S. Africa Command, killing 17 ISIS militants. Citing alleged involvement of Libyan-based ISIS operatives in terrorist attacks across Europe, the U.S. military said that ISIS operatives in Libya have been “reconstituting themselves” in desert areas and that it would “track and hunt these terrorists, degrade their capabilities, disrupt their planning and operations by all appropriate, lawful, and proportionate means.” (Source: [CNN](#) [305])

The International Community and Libya

On March 31, 2017, the European Council announced the renewal of sanctions against three persons seen as a threat to political transition in Libya and the implementation of the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA): Agila Saleh, president of the Libyan Council of Deputies in the House of Representatives; Khalifa Ghweil, prime minister and defense minister of the internationally unrecognized General National Congress; and Nuri Abu Sahmain, president of the internationally unrecognized General National Congress. The European Council viewed the three as “obstructing” implementation of the December 2015 agreement from which the GNA was born. (Source: [European Union Council](#) [306])

The Libyan government has called on the international community to lift the U.N. arms embargo enacted in February 2011. The embargo was originally passed to stop arms from flowing to the Gaddafi regime when it cracked down on protestors. In March 2015, the U.N. Security Council voted to sustain the arms embargo, allowing for only case-by-case exceptions. Members of the Security Council were concerned that weapons transferred to Libya could fall into jihadist hands. (Sources: [NBC News](#) [307], [Washington Times](#) [308], [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](#) [309], [Al Jazeera](#) [310])

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A March 2016 U.N. report found that several companies, individuals, and countries were supplying weapons to factions in Libya in contravention of the international arms embargo. In June 2016, the U.N. Security Council authorized Member States to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya believed to be violating the arms embargo. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [311], [United Nations](#) [312])

As of January 25, 2017, Russia reportedly had “reactivated” an arms deal worth \$2.5 billion with rival military leader in eastern Libya Khalifa Haftar, though Haftar was quoted as saying that Russia had told him weapons could arrive as soon as the U.N. embargo is lifted. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [313])

On March 19, 2017, the U.N. Security Council said the Libyan army would have to unify, with a clear chain of command, before the international arms embargo could be lifted. World powers first said, in May 2016, they would consider lifting the embargo. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [314], [Al Jazeera](#) [313])

Denying Supplies to Terror Entities

On February 6, 2017, Italian authorities arrested three Italians and a Libyan national, accused of smuggling weapons including surface-to-air missiles and assault rifles into Iran and Libya from 2011 to 2015. The equipment was suspected of being destined for a pro-ISIS group and one of the Italians involved was believed to have been radicalized. (Source: [La Repubblica](#) [315])

The Libyan government has attempted to deny oil revenues and supplies to terrorist groups. Most often, this meant blocking shipments to the extremist-controlled port city of Derna. In January 2015, the Tobruk government bombed a Greek operated oil tanker. The ship failed to heed warnings from the Libyan army to stop its shipment. The attack killed one Romanian and one Greek crewman. The vessel was under lease by the Libyan National Oil Corporation and was transporting oil from the Libyan town of Brega to Derna. The Greek government condemned the act as “unprovoked and cowardly” and vowed to “take all the necessary actions towards Libyan authorities.” (Sources: [Reuters](#) [316], [Telegraph](#) [317])

In May 2015, the Libyan army shelled a Turkish vessel. One Turkish crewmember was killed in the incident, which occurred in international waters. Turkish authorities assert that the ship was bound for Tobruk, while the Libyan officials argue it was approaching Derna. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [316], [Telegraph](#) [317])

International Counter-Extremism

The Libyan government has been in turmoil since the fall of Gaddafi’s regime. With rival governments in Tobruk and Tripoli, Libyan authorities are too weak and divided to launch any significant or sustained counter-extremism efforts outside of the country. To the contrary, regional powers continue to consider and launch foreign intervention in Libya. (Source: [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [318])

Libya is a member of the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task force, a regional organization that aims to combat terrorist financing and money laundering. According the U.S. Department of State, the Libyan government and financial system “generally lacks the ability to identify and interdict illicit financial flows.” (Sources: [MENAFATF](#) [319], [U.S. Department of State](#) [233])

Many international organizations and diplomatic missions have reestablished a limited presence in Tripoli, since nearly all evacuated the capital in 2014. Other countries and organizations maintain a permanent presence in Tunis, Tunisia. The political conflict and limited international presence in Libya severely restricted counterterrorism cooperation. International assistance, including U.S. government-provided training on airport security and land border management, increased in 2018. Other border security initiatives—through the EU Border Assistance Mission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)—focused on improving policing and criminal justice functions and counterterrorism legislation and legal frameworks. Libya is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League, and has participated in meetings of the Global Counterterrorism Forum’s (GCTF) West Africa Regional Capacity-Building Working Group. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [161])

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Public Opinion

Islamic extremist groups generally lack popular support in Libya. Some groups like ASL have been able to win a modicum of support through their social welfare programs. However, public opinion is strongly against more radical groups like ISIS. (Sources: [PBS](#) [320], [Daily Star](#) [321], [Business Insider](#) [56])

U.S. Consulate Attack in 2012

The 2012 Benghazi U.S. consulate attack sparked a series of protests against terrorism. Nine days following the attack, as many as 30,000 people marched on Ansar al-Sharia's headquarters in Benghazi. Some demonstrators protested the Salafism espoused by militants and chanted "no to militias." One university student stated, "I don't want to see armed men wearing Afghani-style clothes stopping me in the street to give me orders, I only want to see people in uniform." Others offered sympathy to those killed in the attack, holding signs stating, "The ambassador was Libya's friend" and "Libya lost a friend."

More than 3,000 supporters of Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi (ASB) later staged a counter-protest in the same area.

(Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [322], [Reuters](#) [323], [Foreign Policy](#) [44])

Opposition to ISIS

Libya lacks the sectarian divide between Sunni and Shiite Muslims that ISIS has exploited in Iraq and Syria. Libya is [nearly entirely](#) [320] Sunni and divisions in the country are far more tribal than religious. Consequently, ISIS in Libya is unable to portray themselves as defenders of Sunni Islam in the face of Shiite oppression, and has had trouble integrating into the tribal system. ISIS is most popular in formerly pro-regime areas, including Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte, which have largely been the "losers" in post-revolution Libya.

In March 2015, ISIS beheaded three activists in Derna after they published an anti-ISIS video on Facebook. ISIS also publicly crucified three brothers of a prominent local family. One of the brothers was accused of supporting the Libyan government. An anti-ISIS activist in Derna stated, "The people try to do something inside [the city] but the killings that happen inside Derna, without anyone taking responsibility to stop it, prevent the people of Derna from coming out of their fears and asking for their freedom."

According to a June 2015 *Foreign Policy* piece, it is difficult to quantify the unpopularity of ISIS policies. However, the report noted many residents of Derna decided to "vote with their feet" and leave the city "as penniless refugees rather than submit to Islamic State rule." A particularly compelling factor in the decision to flee ISIS-controlled areas is fear of the group's practice of taking child brides.

A poll conducted by the Center for Strategic International Studies in 2015 found that 72 percent of Libyans believe ISIS are terrorists and 54 percent of Libyans support the international coalition against the group. The same poll revealed that the majority of Libyans think the Nusra Front and al-Qaeda are also terrorist movements.

The spread of ISIS in Libya has also caused growing concern from some of its neighboring countries. Senegalese Colonel Guirane Ndiaye said in March 2016, "ISIS is spreading even to [Senegal]. If we do not have a multinational effort, ISIS will spread even more."

(Source: [Newsweek](#) [324], [Newsweek](#) [36], [Foreign Policy](#) [37], [PBS](#) [320], [Daily Star](#) [321], [Business Insider](#) [56], [Center for Strategic International Studies](#) [325], [New York Times](#) [326])

Demonstrations in Support of Counterterrorism Efforts

In late May 2014, just days after General Khalifa Haftar launched Operation Dignity in an effort to combat Islamist militants, thousands of protesters took to the streets to express their support for the military campaign. The demonstrations, which took place in Tripoli and Benghazi, were dubbed "Friday of Dignity." Protestors also called for the creation of a national army and police force to replace the hundreds of militias across the country. (Source: [Washington](#)

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[Post](#) [327])