



[www.invisible-dog.com](http://www.invisible-dog.com)

[invisibledog@email.com](mailto:invisibledog@email.com)

---

## **SOUTHERN LIBYA : ANOTHER NO-MAN'S LAND**

Libya is currently undergoing a progressive collapse of its social and institutional fabric. Among this regressive dynamic it is difficult to pinpoint the most dangerous and aggravating causes thereof. There is no central authority that decides; there is no capacity to impose the decisions taken; there is no binding agent able to repair the relationship and co-existence between the many social souls present in the country. The final result of all of these elements is the resurfacing of tensions between the different ethnic groups that are geared towards a final armed confrontation between the tribes: Arabs, Tuareg and Berbers. Such armed confrontations are the early warning signs of a nation on its way towards total and utter failure.

This state of affairs is particularly visible and evident in an area that is particularly crucial for the security of the whole of Libya but not of Libya alone: the southern border of the country. The southern Libyan territory is by now in the hands of organized crime. It is an area where every kind of illicit traffic is amply diffused, an area which serves as a refuge for terrorist groups and where the instabilities of Libya bond with those of its neighboring countries. An explosive cocktail that could well be set ablaze and easily infect the entire sub-Saharan strip of Africa.

### **A precarious balance**

The protagonists of this drama are essentially three: the Tebou, the Tuareg and the local Kabyles. The latter are defined by their counterparts as being "Arabs", a reductive description that does not refer so much to the color of the skin or to the difference between nomad and sedentary populations but rather to the difference between the original inhabitants of that territory and other peoples that have settled there centuries ago following conquests and invasions.

The Tebou are a tribe of semi-nomads devoted alternatively to herding or to temporary cultivation of land. With their origin in Tibesti, a mountainous region in northern Chad, this population branches out to Niger and north Sudan. In the 70's, Muhamar Khadafi dreamed of annexing a part of northern Chad, geographically defined as the 'strip of Aouzou', by claiming it belonged to Libya on the basis of an Italian-French accord favoring Italy and to the fact that the area was under the vassalage of the Senussia confraternity. In order to pursue his aims, the Libyan dictator had gotten mixed up in a war against Chad

(also because there was talk of there being uranium in the area) that began in 1973 and which was moreover miserably lost by Libya.

It is in this conjunction that there originates the problem of the Tebou, whom inhabited the disputed area and whom were forced to abandon their territory. Some of them sought refuge in Libya and Khadafi, in order to validate his territorial claims, had granted them Libyan nationality. In 1994 a sentence of the international court of justice had given the strip of Aouzou to Chad, thus putting an end to the territorial claims of the Rais. At this point it wasn't in the Rais' interest any longer to give hospitality to the Tebou, who saw their newly found nationality stripped away. The same happened with their right to access the Libyan social services and their right to residency. In fact, they were discriminated. The decisions of the Libyan regime produced social tensions at a local level – especially in the area of Kufra where the presence of the Tebou was concentrated – and clashes with the local Kabyles, in particular with that of the Zway. In 2008, the Libyan authorities had then repressed the Tebou dissidence with the use of arms.

Once the revolt against the dictator exploded in 2011, the Tebou sided immediately with the rebels, winning consent which currently, among the Libyan social chaos, they tend to cash in by assuming a role of command and control in the southern part of the country. In the imagery of the Arab population there remains diffidence with regards to a community which is perceived as “foreign”; a diffidence that even the stripes won during a conflict cannot erase. This reciprocal diffidence has sparked bloody clashes in 2013 which have produced roughly 350 dead and hundreds of wounded in Cyrenaica. The recent incidents of January 2014 in the areas of Sebha and in the region of Fezzan where the Tebou have collided with the Kebil of the Awlad Sleiman (with over 20 victims) are proof that the problem has not been solved. The reason for the clashes was the elimination of a military chief of the Awlad Suleiman as vengeance for the killing, two years before, of about 40 Tebous. Just the sort of do-it-yourself justice that is common in Libya nowadays.

The Tebou seek the same old things: Libyan citizenship, free access to social services, an increased political representation that can help them uphold their claims. In addition to these, there is the fact that, during the civil war, the Tebou have protected the oil installations and now expect to receive a share from the sale of the oil thereof. Presently, despite the reluctance of the Arab populations, the Tebou have the weapons, are part of the so-called revolutionary brigades and have thus an enhanced contractual power. On the Arab side there is a growing conviction that, apart from the renown smuggling activity that has always fed the Tebou, there is now an exodus of additional Tebous from neighboring countries with the aim of tipping the ethnic balance in a scarcely populated area such as the south of Libya.

The supporting actors in the south of Libya are the Tuareg, whom share the same claims as the Tebou: Libyan citizenship and better social conditions. This convergence of interests has created a bond between the Tebou and the Tuareg, two tribes that had fought each other in the past in order to expand their respective spheres of influence and that have now joined forces against the Arab populations of southern Libya.

## **The southern borders**

Despite the claims or complaints of the various groups present on the Libyan territory, the main problem is that the south of Libya is essentially an insecure and unstable desert. There are over 2000 km of southern borders that are not controlled in any way by the central government. A good part of these – from Kufra to Murzuq – are under the control of the Tebou while the rest – the area of Obari – are in the hands of the Tuareg. This means that the traffics that originate in southern Egypt, in Chad, Sudan and in the eastern part of Niger are now controlled by the Tebou, while the ones coming from western Niger and from Algeria are within the Tuareg jurisdiction.

The Tebou can count on approximately 18 revolutionary brigades which are apparently quite well organized while the Tuareg can only count on 9. In theory, these revolutionary groups should answer, through the Chief of Staff, to the Ministry of Defense. In reality they only safeguard the interests and follow the orders of their direct commanders. Moreover, these militias don't need a salary because they control very profitable trades like arms, alcohol and drugs which transit freely in the areas under their control. There are no customs, there is no border police and the main crossings are under the control of these same militias that have a thorough knowledge of the desert areas where they operate. One can enter and exit Libya only with their consent and by paying a right of passage. This is one of the reasons why the traffic of migrants has found new impetus after the elimination of Khadafi. According to certain esteems, an average of 5 to 6 hundred migrants enter southern Libya on any given day.

The Tripoli authorities have stated that the south of the country is a “militarized zone” in a clumsy attempt to limit the access and transit of things and people in the area. A military governor has been designated but has no power to intervene, seen the sheer military preponderance of the revolutionary (“Thuwars”) brigades (“Katiba”) compared to the scant and badly armed police forces and the regular army. In this part of Libya the police does not intervene (or rather, it does only against weaker military sides) and the judges refuse to judge crimes connected to the traffics of the Tebou by adopting the tactic of postponing trials or passing decisions on to the tribal elders. The rest is regulated by corruption and by the code of silence.

The most worrisome aspect of this situation are the recurrent rumors about the presence, especially in the areas bordering Algeria (thus in the areas controlled by the Tuareg) of terrorist camps belonging to AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb), a formation that is very active in Algeria and which is also present in northern Mali. The French intervention in northern Mali would have caused these groups to spill into Libya. This circumstance would postulate a collusion between terrorists and Tuaregs or, at least, the indifference of the latter with regards to the military aspirations of the Islamic extremists. Moreover, some of the Tuareg Katibas, such as the 315, headed by Sheykh Ahmed Omar, seem to express a subtle nearness to the claims of AQIM.

A further problem is represented by the presence of individuals and groups tied to the defunct dictator which, once the regime had collapsed, have sought refuge in the south of the country. This has caused a series of clashes between Kabyles and in particular

between those tied to Khadafi – like the Warfalla and the Qadhadfa (Khadafi's original Kabyle) – which are presently discriminated and support the armed opposition.

### **No solution in view**

There presently exists no solution to this state of affairs and there will exist none until a central authority has been created. Presently, the rulers of southern Libya are the Tebou, the Tuareg and, in the role of the gooseberry, the Arabs (both for and against the defunct Rais). Recently the Tebou and the Tuareg, those that derive profit from the traffics across borders, have negotiated (without the authorization nor financing from the government) with the authorities from Niger on a presumed cooperation along the border.

On paper, the Tripoli government aims at reconquering southern Libya from the aforementioned tribes. There is even an old project – part of the friendship treaty negotiated with Italy in 2008 – that has been picked out of the dust of time. With the excuse of curbing immigration, Khadafi asked Italy to install a radar system along the southern border of the country. The fact that such a system was ineffective against dot-shaped migrants in the middle of a desert was known to all. But Khadafi wanted the radars and Italy wanted to indulge him. It was a 300 million euro project that was financed in part – reluctantly so, it must be said – by the European Union.

Now the project has been fished out of drawer by Tripoli and once again humored by Rome. It will be a great favor to Finmeccanica which, through Selex, will build the radars, but it will not serve the purpose of controlling southern Libya. The Tebou and the Tuareg can therefore sleep tight; nobody is bound to disturb them anytime soon.

## **LIBYA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE**

Unlike in other countries in the Maghreb and in the Middle East, the success of the Libyan revolution was not the exclusive outcome of a civil war fought by a people in despair who sacrificed their lives. Instead, an international coalition was put together with the intent of toppling Muammar Khadafi and aid the rebels win their war. In fact, it was the coalition that defeated the Libyan dictator and the militias merely collected his spoils. Mean me no disrespect for all those valiant combatants who have perished to oust Khadafi, but this is the harsh truth.

If an international coalition had not intervened, the Libyan dictator would still be in the top spot today. The way the civil war unraveled and the obstinacy that accompanied the fight of the loyalists against a preponderant enemy widely prove this. So - and this is the question - how do these statements help us understand what is happening in Libya today?

### **A victory without winners**

In general terms, in a civil war where the actors are solely domestic, with no external interference, the final result usually reflects the strength of the forces on the ground. In other words, the winner is the strongest, the most determined and is also the most popular. When the civil war ends, the balance of power is immediately clear and the winners are tasked with coagulating the consensus they have gained and shift it from the military level, to the popular one and, finally, turn into political support.

But if this does not happen and the final result is tampered by external interventions, then the whole process reaches a standstill: none of the actors have proven to be better than the rest and no agreement can be reached among them on who is going to rule over the others. Libya falls in this category.

A corollary to this statement is that the foreign countries that helped you win the war will be the basis for your international support. This will bring about benefits for your foreign policy, but could have detrimental effects on the domestic front. Firstly because any help that is received in foreign policy turns into influence: some of it is spontaneous, some is out of gratitude, but a good portion are "pressures" exercised to appease the "expectations" of those who came to your help (diplomacy has turned around the word "blackmail" and given it a more suave impact).

On the domestic front this means - as the lesson learnt in Afghanistan teach us - that you'll end up having a government with loads of international support, but uninfluential at home. Another consequence of international backing is that the new authorities in town will skip all democratic tests or the passing of those exams on human rights and rule of law usually required in normal circumstances. The result is that the new rulers will be able to dedicate themselves exclusively to the consolidation of power according to schemes they are already familiar with.

Libya was never a democracy, it doesn't have any political models on which to build it's own democratic path. This inevitably leads to the involution of a noble social act as is the rebellion against a dictatorship.

In other words, a regime is ousted, but those replacing it are incapable of proposing alternative social or political models. A country like Libya that has still not found the way out of the civil war, without enough strength to build new political paths, is now at a crossroads: on one side the progressive and ongoing dissolution of the State, on the other the return of a coercive political authority that, just like under Khadafi, will rule through brute force and not with consensus.

### **The Kabyles, return to the future**

Muammar Khadafi was with no doubt a bloodthirsty dictator, he could not tolerate dissent and wiped out without pity any form of opposition. He ruled over the policies of the State, but had also cultivated - in his unorthodox manner - his consensus throughout the country's main social infrastructure: the Kabyles (a term used locally to identify beduin tribes or clans). The civil war has shown how some Kabyles have supported his regime until the very end (like the Warfalla in Bani Walid), while others fought him to his death (as the Magharba in Cyrenaica did). Today Libya has sunken in its feudal past again.

The picture from Libya is the following: the Kabyles control - de facto - power; the militias are mostly all clan based, they hold onto their weapons regardless of the requests coming from central authorities and obey the orders from their respective Kabyles; the ancient rivalry between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica has reemerged together with the winds of secession; the social fabric is being ripped apart by clan and family blood feuds. Once the opportunity for national reconciliation was missed, the direct consequence was that the institutions leading over the country immediately lost their legitimacy. The outcome is a government that does not rule, an army with no strength, a police force that doesn't know who to report to and hence avoids all interventions.

Probably the most worrying aspect is the unwinding social fabric and the recurrent clashes between the Kabyles, the war between the Kabyles and the nomadic tribes, the resurfacing of the Tuareg and Berber separatist agendas. Khadafi cannot be held up as an example of social cohesion, but he was definitely capable of ruling over the Kabyles and regulated each of their conflicts. He did it his way: with gifts and threats and with the use of force when necessary. And he achieved his objectives.

If we take into account the fact that the Libyan civil war ended with the killing of Muammar Khadafi in October 2011, over two year later the country is still stuck in the middle of an institutional and power void that has still not found a solution.

### **The return of armed political Islam**

The Arab Spring has contributed to the resurgence, in Libya as elsewhere, of political Islam. In a country that had fought terrorism under the previous ruler - incarnated by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) - now hails as heroes people like Abdel Hakim Belhadj. With a battle name of Abu Abdallah Assadaq, the former member of the LIFG was arrested in Thailand (2004), "extraordinary renditioned" to Tripoli, detained and pardoned by the regime in 2009. Belhadj became the chief of Tripoli's military council after the civil war.

Such circumstances require an adequate timeframe to be socially metabolized and turning into founding elements of a new stability, On the political level, Libya is currently in a stall between Islamic factions, like the Muslim Brotherhood, and an alliance of secular National Forces. Killings have now become a routine. The areas surrounding Benghazi are at the mercy of Islamic groups.

The final question is: what will happen to Libya? What will be the outcome? The options and the solutions for an adequate reply will depend on how domestic events will evolve, but also from what will happen in neighboring countries. Bearing in mind what happened elsewhere, there are two probable paths: the restoration (not necessarily of Khadafi loyalists) of an authoritarian regime, just like what happened in Egypt, even though it is difficult to predict who could take over. The alternative is for Libya to become the next Syria or, in the worst case scenario, slide down the Somali path to dissolution.

## **LIBYA AND THE RETURN OF KHADAFI'S LOYALISTS**

Libya is still split between those who supported Muammar Khadafi and those who fought him. The distinction between winners and losers is more evident today, after two years since the killing of the dictator. This circumstance is responsible for fueling hatred, revenges and social discrimination. If we add to the picture the widespread social anarchy, we are creating the ideal conditions for a return of those forces whom, even during the conflict, supported the dictator. And this is what is happening now in Libya.

### **The wrong example**

Several among Khadafi's loyalists lead or engross the ranks of those militias running Libya today. Some of them turned coat out of belief, others for opportunism. For the latter, a pacified country is against their interests. What is more striking is that several members of the old security services stayed in their posts. Some of them have even been promoted. It is certain that no one is willing to take bets on their democratic reliability.

A law recently approved by the new Parliament in Tripoli has decided the lay off of all those public and government employees who had worked under the Khadafi regime. A decision that has created resentment in all those people - the majority of them as a matter of fact - who had officially adhered to the regime, worked for it, but did not share the responsibility for its deeds or misdeeds.

This is the same mistake that the US Proconsul in Iraq, Paul Bremer, had committed a decade before after the invasion and the removal of Saddam Hussein. He too had decided to fire all the government employees and the military in service during the regime. The result was the outburst of the Sunni guerrilla whose actions continue until today. Libya has decided to follow the wrong example.

What is more significant is that, following the civil war and the unwinding of the Libyan social fabric, the supporters of the old regime are gaining consensus among all those nostalgic of the pax under the Rais. This has fueled a growing armed opposition that can rely on an increasing popular support.

### **Armed nostalgics**

Those leading the opposition against the new authorities in Tripoli are not, at least for the time being, the members of the Khadafi family. His widow, his daughter Aisha and his sons Hannibal and Mohamed are now all in Oman. Mutassim, Seif al Arabi and Khamis all died during the war. Seif al Islam is imprisoned in Zintan waiting for his trial. Saadi instead has found refuge in Niger where he has married a local woman. There were rumors about a possible extradition to Libya for the only sibling of Khadafi who could, at least theoretically, still play a role in the loyalists' comeback. But Saadi, even though pompously invested of the rank of Colonel in the Libyan army, lacks the ability to play such a leading role. Even if he were extradited, this would not affect the nostalgics' chances.

In fact, there are a series of very active big shots of the old regime who continue to foment the dissidence from abroad. The majority of them resides in Egypt, where, after the return

to power of the military, they can benefit from a good dose of protection. The deposed president Mohamed Morsi had menaced to extradite them and several among them had found shelter in Malta. They have money to spend - all those resources accumulated under the Rais - and can invest in a conflict that, if victorious, would see them return at the center of power and at the helm of their economic interests.

An indirect confirmation of the existence of an organized opposition to the new authorities in Tripoli came from PM Ali Zeidan's speech at the latest UN General Assembly held in New York in September 2013. The Libyan Prime Minister spoke openly about old regime figures involved in "criminal activities" in neighboring countries. Zeidan then appealed to Egypt, Niger and Algeria for an enhanced cooperation. The Libyan PM did not fail to mention the 100 billion dollars invested by Khadafi in Africa. This is a wealth Ali Zeidan would like to recover, but which now constitutes the backbone of the financial support of the armed conflict waged by the regime's nostalgics.

### **Chronicles from the resistance**

There is definitely on the ground today a Khadafi-inspired form of armed resistance to the current Libyan leadership.

The most impressive action was undertaken in January 2014 with the occupation of an air base in Tamenhint, close to Sebha, that was freed after a few days following the intervention of the revolutionary brigades coming from Misrata and Zintan. The exploit showed the strength of the loyalists, but also the support they receive in the south of Libya, where they can move around with sufficient freedom.

At the same time of the operation in Tamenhint, the Libyan security forces apprehended five people in Sabratha who were going to Sebha to fight with the loyalists. Contextually, old regime flags appeared in Ajaylat. The fact that all these events occurred simultaneously in distant geographical areas suggests the existence of an unspecified command. In other words, these are not just isolated events, but they are linked to one-another. The latest episode of the series is the recent profanation of the Italian monumental cemetery in Tripoli, an action retracing offenses dear to both Khadafi and his people's committees.

Programs and statements from the opposition reach the Libyan soil also thanks to satellite TV channels. It is the case of NileSat in Egypt, and of Al Hurrah, Al Jazeera and Al Arabya, all of whom air news that are not appreciated by the new authorities in Tripoli. In fact, the current Libyan leadership has tried to block them, but failed. There is also the issue of the Libyan students abroad. Many of them had received their scholarships from Khadafi and can be considered to be close to the now-defunct dictator. The Libyan government is monitoring the situation through its embassies. The plan is to probably withdraw

these scholarship, even though the government doesn't have the strength to ask for or impose such a measure. Overall, it is pretty evident an opposition abroad exists and is gaining in vigor.

### **Missed reconciliation**

The biggest problem is that the blood feuds between families and tribes that have erupted following the civil war have not been healed and continue with in their endless series of clashes and deaths until this very day. The Kabyles that supported Muammar Khadafi are now persecuted. The feelings of revenge of the losers come face to face with the arrogance of the winners on a daily basis.

In Misrata around one hundred soldiers of the former regime are still under trial and could face the death penalty. In 2013 a former minister under Khadafi, Ahmed Ibrahim, was sentenced to death. In today's Libya each important faction has its own prison and tribunal. It is the case for Misrata, Zintan, Zawiyah, Benghazi and Tripoli. As for now, the death penalties have not been carried out, but were still inflicted without offering the accused the opportunity to defend themselves.

Justice has been handled by military or civil tribunals, which international human rights organizations have criticized for their lack of fairness. The militias menace the judges, the solicitors and the families of those accused, while the police is incapable of granting the security of the judiciary. Recurrent cases of torture and abuses don't hit the news anymore. Recently a former Major General under Khadafi, Al Hadi Imbareh, has perished in detention. It is unclear whether his was a natural death or not.

It's in such a context of "DIY justice" that the fate - pretty surely nefarious for most of them - of 30 high ranking officials of the former regime now awaiting trial in Tripoli (to which we should add Seif al Islam, who is still in Zintan under the control of the local brigades) will be decided. Khadafi's son is also wanted by the International Criminal Court in the Hague, but their request has still not been met. On November 5, 2013, Seif al Islam stated during a radio interview that he was more than happy to be judged in Libya. How spontaneous such a comment could have been is hard to judge.

The ICC has instead dropped its request for extradition for Seif's uncle and Khadafi's brother-in-law, Abdallah Senussi. Senussi recently appeared in Court in Tripoli and hardly resembles the man he was on the day he was delivered from Mauritania. Some claim he has a cancer, others think differently. Regardless, his destiny is written.

These showcase trials, whose role in the propaganda is pretty clear, should also offer the semblance of rule of law, but instead expose a country going adrift. And under the reign of chaos, there is plenty of room for the nostalgia of the old regime.