



## Reports

### Post-revolution Islamist Movements in Libya: Transformation and Future (\*)

*Nazar Kraikish\*\**



[Aljazeera]

\* Following is a translation of a summarized version of a full Arabic report, written by Nazar Kraikish, a Libyan Researcher and Political Analyst. Below is the link for the Arabic text:

<http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2016/09/160906083705908.html>

## Introduction

A probable development of the events in Libya and the changes experienced by Islamist movements is that they are heading for definitive inter-factional confrontation. The Muslim Brotherhood group (MBH) is now holding a debate that may end up in dissolving the group.

Several attempts were made to help understand the setup of the Libyan state and the absence of social movements in Libya that have goals, resources and a political culture qualifying them for using violent or non-violent means for directing society to specific objectives.

Movements in this sense are not available in Libya. Though, Islamic movements in Libya cannot be perceived as effective social movements possessing resources and political opportunities along with institutional networking which is capable of directing social

trends. This paper analyses how Islamist movements were able to take part in the revolution and even directing society during several transitional periods in Libya.

## **Analysing Islamist Movements in Libya**

During his fully totalitarian rule, Kaddafi managed to suppress all cultural movements and trends in Libya. Instead, he set up a one-party system that expressed his own vision and views by employing all ways and means. That was why the Libyan youth and intellectuals pursued Islamist movements to help fulfilling their aspirations.

Libya has been well acquainted with political parties since the end of the 19th. Century while the royal ruling system was plagued by confrontations between the king on one hand, and the civil society organizations and political parties on the other. After his power takeover, Kaddafi suppressed all attempts for organizing social institutions. When the revolution broke out, the MBH group emerged as an expression of political rather than civil activity.

## **The Muslim Brotherhood Group**

The MBH group began its activity in Libya in 1949, subsequent to the events that took place in Egypt when King Idrees al-Sanousi received those who fled to Libya after they were falsely accused of assassinating Mahmud Fahmy al-Naqrashi, the Egyptian prime minister at that time. The Egyptian MBH members who took part in the 1948 Palestine war were also welcomed in Libya under the protection of the royal family. Thus, the group started to grow after setting up the organization in Tripoli in 1968. After Kaddafi staged his military coup in September 1969, many MBH members left the country by 1974. In 1982, the Islamist National Salvation Front was established after many non-Islamists were granted membership. The MBH group led a failed coup attempt in Tripoli in 1984 after which many of its members were put behind bars. The group went into hiding and had no open activity as a social movement comparable to what had occurred in Egypt and Jordan.

## **MBH Party Setup**

- Muslim cleric Ali al-Salabi suggested the formation of a broad-based party that would include all Islamic movements, but the idea was promptly turned down. The group headed for setting up a national party that would embrace all Libyans

who believe in Islam as a party reference. The decision excluded participation of the “Muslim Combat Group” (MCG), thus posing diversity in vision and conception.

- An explicit desire for open participation with non-members was exhibited during the first MBH party conference where women were also welcomed as members of the party’s higher committee. The party’s name ran in parallel with its counterparts in Morocco and Turkey, while respect to democracy and human rights were implicitly embraced.
- The contradiction in excluding the “Muslim Combat Group” while embracing non-Islamist members can be explained by the desire to form a broad-based movement rather than seclusion within the Islamic movement.
- An important decision taken by the Libyan MBH group was its disengagement from the international Muslim Brotherhood Organization. Instead, the group underscored its national affiliation to Libya.
- The party’s general trend featured the same precepts as those of the MBH group ideology as it perceived Islam as its reference. Furthermore, the inferences of Sharia law were deemed as the base for understanding Sharia. The party then withheld this issue from public debate, not in repudiation, but focus was put on development and political participation in consistence with the party’s election plan.
- The party’s trend was again modified when it held its national congress on August 8, 2012, since political performance, particularly in vote counting and in electing the national congress’ chairman, prompted the need for an ideological dimension.

This account about the MBH party’s development, casts light on the separation between the political party and the Daawa (call) group in the Libyan context, though this group is not a genuine part of the Libyan social component. The party gave top priority to its political performance and to power sharing by assuming ministerial portfolios including oil and the economy. By skipping its social functions, the party erroneously believed that it can garner popular support and influence. Accordingly, a political party in this Libyan context is but a continuation of the historical error of missing social development and its related institutions.

### **The Libyan Islamic Movement for Change (Islamic Combat Group)**

The founders of this movement belonged to Tripoli University and became active in coincidence with Afghanistan events in 1989. The Kaddafi-led regime forced many young party members to flee the country and joining the war under the banner of the so-called

Islamic Federation. In 1990 the fighters decided to return to Libya and set up the Islamic Combat Group (ICG). That later staged several coup attempts and to assassinate Kaddafi.

Similar to other Jihadist groups in Egypt, the Libyan ICG was exposed to religious re-orientation sessions under the regime's sponsorship. After they were released from prisons, many group members joined social activity by working within relatively democratic institutions, in compliance with the Sharia law.

The group participated in the Libyan revolution by forming an armed brigade that took part in liberating Tripoli, thanks to some of its highly trained fighters. The Libyan Islamic Movement for Change was also set up and participated in the elections via its two parties.

No links with al-Qaeda or any international organization with the ICG have ever been traced after the revolution, while the group continued their activity in parliament and government institutions as a genuine political party.

After armed conflict broke out in Libya, Islamic parties, excluding some Salafist groups, joined forces against general Khalifa Haftar and the "Karama" operation that he initiated on May 16, 2014. The Muslim Brotherhood group was divided over the Sukheirat dialogue held on March, 5, 2015 for reaching reconciliation over a Libyan unified ruling authority.

## **Salafist Groups**

Salafists are a conservative group that emerged alongside other Islamic groups in Libya in the 1980s. The group kept following the footsteps of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by reprinting Saudi religious publications, "fatwa" (interpretation). The group did not oppose the Kaddafi regime and were even used by the regime's security apparatus for tracking down regime opponents such as the ICG members. The group kept a low profile after anti-Kaddafi revolution broke out, but kept slamming the MBH group during Friday prayer sermons. The movement has taken part in the fighting in Benghazi in eastern Libya and was accused of killing and torturing their opponents, particularly members of the MBG.

## Extremist groups

### **Post-revolution factors that led to "extremism"**

- Unrestricted possession of arms: Between the 1970s and the 1980s, Kaddafi spent around \$28 billion on armament. Thus, the number of armed people in Libya has been estimated at 150 thousand armed men.
- Lack of control by the military: Maintaining security by post-revolution governments in Tunisia and Egypt, could not be matched with Libya's total failure in maintaining security and stability. The number of armed brigades reached more than 200 in Misrata alone.
- Absence of state institutions: this led to the emergence of numerous leaders, a number of whom used politics, others combined politics with arms.
- Imported Extremism: Many extremist groups that came from Algeria, particularly those who founded Ansar al-Sharia Group, have later developed into the currently active Islamic State Organization (ISIS).

These factors reaffirm that developing state institutions is imperative for alleviating political violence and chaos, as Charles Taylor has pointed out in his study of the French revolution.

## Future Scenarios

Speculations about the future indicate an ambivalence in which the Libyan scene would be teetering between cautious stability or gross violence for many years. This scenario is supported by the progress made by the Libyan forces in Sirte. Alternatively, the country would be divided leaving a weak Egyptian-backed state in eastern Libya, alongside escalation in violence and terrorism.

Another scenario is the proliferation of the Islamic state Organization and "terrorism" and communication with southern Libya. This would make north Africa a region of tension with a higher inflow of extremist groups that would further weaken all moderate movements. This would spread violence in Libya and neighbouring countries, particularly in Tunisia, Algeria and Mali.

A possible scenario involves the annihilation of the Islamic State Organization in Sirte while the Libyan presidential council would be in a position to lay control on Tripoli. Meanwhile, conflict may probably arise between some Islamist factions in Tripoli who maintain links with the ICG and some opponents to the Libyan dialogue on one hand,

and other armed factions, including Salafists, on the other. This scenario could make the MBH group more prone to changing their policies including the possible dissolution of the group and setting up civil institutions that would focus on Daawa (call) and social education. The justice and Development party would remain as is within the political process in Libya.

With respect to extremist movements, viewed in the context of effective Libyan Council powers, their future would be pending government action, as terrorism is categorically rejected by all social components. Accordingly, the future of extremist movements would be bleak and could be classified as political violence that would gradually disappear as state institutions keep growing.

---

*(\*\*)Nazar Kraikish, a Libyan Researcher and Political Analyst.*

Copyright © 2016 Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, All rights reserved.