

CHAPTER 6



Salafism and Libya's State Collapse

The Case of the Madkhalis

INTRODUCTION

In Libya, a postrevolutionary fragmentation into hyperlocal politics, factional conflict, the struggle for oil wealth, and civil war have profoundly transformed Salafism. Salafis in war-torn Libya have emerged as highly autonomous and assertive actors, in social, religious, and educational spaces, as well as in the security sector and on the battlefield. Among Libya's Salafis, militant jihadists have received the most attention. Emerging early in the 2011 revolution, they drew upon a long legacy of armed Islamist action that started in the 1980s from the Afghan war generation, attempted to topple Gaddafi in the 1990s, and participated in other wars in Algeria, Chechnya, and Iraq. Exploiting this trend, the Islamic State, drawing from Libyan fighters returning from the Syrian jihad and bolstered by foreign advisors and recruits, set up its strongest affiliate outside of Syria and Iraq. Meanwhile, al-Qaeda's Saharan affiliates have used Libya's ungovernance, especially in the south, for logistics and training.

Yet the country's Salafi landscape is far more complex than this focus on jihadi currents suggests—and even within the jihadi movement, there are intense debates and fissures. The vast majority of Libya's Salafis are nonviolent and focused on *da'wa* and piety. Some participated in Libya's aborted election experiment in 2012, an event that confronted Salafis with potential opportunities and dilemmas regarding whether or not to affiliate with the state; and if so, how to best approach such affiliation. With Libya's

dissolution into warring factions starting in 2014, Salafis emerged as major political and military players.

At the center of this new assertiveness is a particular variant of Salafism—the so-called Madkhali¹ current, named for its affiliation with Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, the Saudi “quietist” cleric whose views are described in chapter 1.² Originally supported in Libya by Gaddafi, albeit tentatively because of their links to Saudi Arabia, these Salafis were intended to shore up his regime with their doctrine of political obedience. In the postrevolutionary period, this bedrock ideology of quietism, commonly thought to be immutable and theologically fixed, has been transformed by Libya’s fractured context. Madkhali militias are now active across Libya as partisans in the national political conflict. As in the case of other armed groups and factions, some of them are engaged in a fierce struggle for Libya’s oil wealth and control of the illicit economy to enhance their power.³ They have also waged an ideological contest with Sufis and other Islamist currents over public space, schools, mosques, and Islamic endowments (*awqaf*), and on radio and television airwaves. Sometimes this confrontation has spilled into violence.

Aside from Libya’s political vacuum and factional conflict, the growth of the Madkhalis has been aided by psychological, economic, and sociological factors. Those factors include the attraction of Salafism as a means to assert personal autonomy and discipline in the face of growing chaos, the role of Madkhalism in establishing grassroots economic networks (though there does not seem to be a specific class base to Madkhalis), and the ability of Madkhalism to mediate, if not completely overcome, tribal and even ethnolinguistic barriers. More recently, adherents of Madkhalism have pointed to the chaos in Libya that followed the overthrow of Gaddafi to advance a narrative of triumphalism—that they were right all along in not challenging the dictator’s rule.⁴

This chapter will explore the growth and implications of Madkhali Salafism in Libya, situating this little-studied trend within Libya’s socioeconomic and political context, especially the latter stages of Gaddafi’s rule and the bedlam that followed the 2011 revolution. It will argue that Madkhalism’s rise has been facilitated by Libya’s institutional vacuum, the legacy of Gaddafi’s policy of active sponsorship, political fragmentation, the proliferation of armed groups, and competition for economic resources. It will trace the doctrinal debates and dilemmas that confronted the Madkhalis about associating with the state and Libya’s widening political fissures. Rampant crime and the growth of the Islamic State provided many Madkhali armed groups a ready-made narrative to sell to Libyan publics, as crime fighters and counterterrorists. While it is unlikely that the Madkhalis will cohere as a national political force, as some have argued,

given the strength of local affinities to region, town, and tribe, there is still communication and cooperation among Madkhali factions across the country. Moreover, their power in society is likely to grow, especially when compared to weakened Sufis and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as hybrid Islamist currents. While some of this is due to the Madkhalis' use of armed force and access to funds, it also reflects a deeper evolution of parts of Libyan society toward greater conservatism, especially since the 2011 revolution.

SALAFISM AND LIBYA'S ISLAMIST LANDSCAPE

A vast desert country three times the size of France, Libya's population sits at around 6.5 million—less than the population of the state of Massachusetts. Most of its citizens are concentrated in urban centers along the Mediterranean coast, with 65% in Tripolitania and 28% in the east, Cyrenaica or Barqa. The inhabitants of the southern region of Fezzan, with its strong links to the Sahel and Sahara, constitute just 7%.⁵ The country is overwhelmingly Sunni and Arabic speaking, with ethnolinguistic minorities—the Imazighen (commonly known as Berbers), the Tuareg, and the Tabu—inhabiting the western and southern peripheries. Tribal kinship remains an important social bond, though it is often context-dependent and constructed.⁶

Libya's long history of weak institutions has influenced its present conditions. Even in antiquity, Libya was a place on the margins, and its successive foreign rulers—the Ottomans, the Italians, and the British—never set up real indigenous political institutions or created a local educated class, preferring instead to rule through urban notables and rural tribal elites. For centuries, the country lacked any structure resembling a protostate, with the possible exception of the Sufi revivalist order of the Sanussiyya.⁷

Founded in 1843 by Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Sanussi, the Sanussiyya achieved widespread influence in the eastern Cyrenaica during the Ottoman administration.⁸ In its doctrinal outlook, the Sanussiyya can be said to resemble Salafism, especially the reformist Salafism under Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. It posited an austere and scripturalist Islam that returned to the "pure sources"—the Qur'an and Hadith—in order to fortify the Muslim ummah against European influence.⁹ Politically, though, the order's influence hinged on its use of Islam to assimilate Libyan tribes—principally, the Arab Saadi and Murabitun, as well as the Tuareg and Tabu—and, especially, the role of its *zawiyas* (lodges) in mediating conflict and trans-Saharan trade. The arrival of the Italian occupation in 1911, with its widespread devastation of pastoralism and catastrophic loss of life, presented

a dire challenge to the Sanussi elite and to the role of Islam as a political unifier.¹⁰

In 1951, Libya became independent. The new state, formed from the provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan with the reluctant cooperation of local elites, was ruled as a kingdom by the head of the eastern-based Sanussi order, Muhammad Idris bin Muhammad al-Mahdi al-Senussi (known as King Idris). During this troubled reign, Libya remained one of the poorest countries on earth, and illiteracy hovered at 90%.¹¹ Though the king tried to use Islam to shore up his sagging legitimacy, a number of societal trends undermined his efforts: urbanization and the erosion of tribalism, the discovery of oil, and the rise of competing ideologies sweeping the Arab world, like Arab nationalism and the Muslim Brotherhood.¹² Underpinning these movements in Libya was growing criticism of Idris as a lackey of foreign interests, rooted in his hosting of American and British military bases and deals with Western oil companies.

On September 1, 1969, a group of Libyan army officers toppled Idris in a bloodless coup. The young captain who quickly emerged at the head of the officers' clique, Muammar Gaddafi, undertook a series of socioeconomic, cultural, and political changes inspired by the Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism of his idol Gamal Abdel Nasser, the ruler of Egypt, and by socialism. Ideologically, Gaddafi saw Islam and especially the traditionalist Islam of the Sanussiyya as reactionary and antimodern. But more importantly, the Sufi orders of the Sanussiyya presented threats to Gaddafi's rule. And so in the first years of his self-styled revolution, he sought to destroy the vestiges of the Sanussiyya dynasty through the expropriation of land endowments, the destruction of Sufi shrines and other sites, and propaganda attacks on Sufis.¹³

Yet beyond this initial denigration of the Sanussiyya, Islam figured prominently in the ensuing rule of Muammar Gaddafi. Using the country's oil wealth, he built up Islamic institutions to neutralize opponents and curry support. In 1972, he created his missionary vehicle for propagating Islam, the Islamic Call Society.¹⁴ In a seminal 1973 speech in Zuwara, he laid out sharia as a basis for law in the Libyan state—part of his burgeoning “Third Universal Theory” that underpinned his Green Book.¹⁵ By 1977, this vision of Islamic socialism, combined with direct democracy and Arab nationalism, had coalesced into the declaration of the *Jamahiriya*, or “state of the masses.”¹⁶ Citing the supposed egalitarianism of this new political construct, he declared that every citizen had the right to use *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) to access the Qur'an, thus removing the *raison d'être* of the clerical class.¹⁷

Increasingly, much of Gaddafi's Islamization of society became aimed at undercutting traditional clerical elites while also trying to “out-Islamicize”

political Islamists. Faced with mounting opposition from the ulema, he undertook a series of repressive measures, to include banning political discussions by clerics and imprisoning and killing clerical critics, often after forced confessions of foreign funding.¹⁸ The Muslim Brotherhood was a particular target.¹⁹ By the 1980s, Gaddafi's appropriation of Islam and his crackdown drove dissident voices toward underground militancy. Yet in quick succession, Gaddafi was able to root out these cells and unravel their plots, whether from the Islamist wings of the National Salvation Front or the Hizb al-Tahrir, which tried to infiltrate the armed forces, or the tiny Harakat al-Jihad organization, which had reportedly planned a string of assassinations and bombings.²⁰

Even so, by the late 1980s, a serious and sustained challenge to his regime emerged from the ranks of Libyan veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. Roughly eight hundred to a thousand Libyans went to Afghanistan, drawn primarily from urban centers such as Tripoli and Benghazi, with backgrounds ranging from unskilled laborers to a minority of postgraduates.²¹ Many who went had absorbed the Salafi-jihadist ideas of Abdullah Azzam through smuggled cassettes, and they later mixed with other fighters from across the Arab world in safehouses in Peshawar and on the Afghan battlefield.²²

Inspired by this ferment, a cadre of these veterans formed the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, in 1990.²³ Seeking to establish an Islamic state in Libya through the clandestine, elitist model of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the LIFG and various offshoots conducted a fierce insurgency, marked by repeated assassination attempts against Gaddafi and raids on army training camps and arms depots. The regime responded brutally, with airstrikes, ground assaults, and mass arrests. The eastern town of Dirna—historically a locus of anti-Gaddafi sentiment and armed mobilization—suffered siege-like repression in the form of shutoffs of water and electricity and the closure of cultural outlets.²⁴ The regime threw hundreds of LIFG fighters into prison and razed the homes of their families and supporters.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, this wave of incarceration and collective punishment would contribute to the radicalization of a second generation of jihadists, especially after the regime's massacre of over one thousand prisoners at Tripoli's Abu Slim prison in 1996.

By the turn of the millennium, Gaddafi's crackdown had weakened the LIFG through arrests and deaths. Combined with this attrition, the movement had failed to achieve popular support, especially among eastern Libya's major tribes, who filled the ranks of the security services and elite army units.²⁶ Events outside Libya had further halted its campaign; several of its Algeria-based leaders were executed by the Algerian GIA (Armed Islamic Group) for refusing to pledge allegiance, while other

came to believe that jihad could be practiced on other battlefields, such as Chechnya.²⁷ In 2000, the LIFG's Afghanistan-based leadership declared a cease-fire, to be revisited in 2003.²⁸ Yet the post-9/11 period brought even greater challenges to its future: presenting itself as a partner in the American-led "global war on terrorism," the Gaddafi regime cooperated with the CIA and the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in arresting LIFG members abroad—allegedly for ties to al-Qaeda, though the LIFG as a whole had, in fact, refused to join the terrorist organization.²⁹

In 2005, Gaddafi opened a dialogue with exiled LIFG leaders and imprisoned cadres. Spearheaded by Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam, this program of "deradicalization" was inspired by a similar program underway in Egypt and relied upon a range of inducements to cooperative prisoners.³⁰ Using a Doha-based cleric named Ali Sallabi as an intermediary and drawing upon the efforts of exiled LIFG leaders to meet secretly with imprisoned members, the multiyear effort produced a sweeping theological "revision" by LIFG ideologues that argued in detailed juridical terms for the impermissibility of violent jihad. The effort caused splits in the LIFG's ranks, most notably from the hardliner Abu Layth al-Libi, who rejected the talks and who, in conjunction with Aymen al-Zawahiri, announced the group's joining with al-Qaeda in 2007—a move opposed by a majority of the LIFG's other leadership.³¹ By 2010, the regime declared the deradicalization and rehabilitation program a success, marking its conclusion with a release of prisoners and a gala dinner hosted by Saif and attended by Western counterterrorism experts. Yet, for all the fanfare, the deradicalization process failed to remove the underlying socioeconomic and political grievances against Gaddafi that had fueled jihadism—or opposition in general. Many of those jihadists deemed "rehabilitated" would join the revolution of 2011 at its outset, ascending to prominent positions of military command through their previous battlefield experience and also military support from Qatar.

In the meantime, though, the removal of the jihadist threat through this project of deradicalization saw the concurrent growth of the so-called Madkhali strand of Salafism, co-opted and deployed by the Gaddafi regime to further minimize the appeal of the jihadism and other forms of activist Islam.

THE RISE OF MADKHALISM UNDER GADDAFI

Madkhali Salafism in Libya grew out of a combination of social, political, and foreign influences: increased religiosity among Libyan youth—to include their connections via new media to outside Islamic influences; co-optation and sponsorship by Gaddafi; and the Saudi government's promotion

of Madkhalism both at home and abroad. Yet for much of the 1980s, the regime adopted an ambivalent and, according to some Salafis, ignorant attitude about Salafism: its intelligence services simply did not grasp the significance of the written and audio Salafi material that had started coming into the country from abroad.³² By the 1990s, however, this shifted drastically. In the context of the war in neighboring Algeria and the LIFG insurgency at home, the regime began scrutinizing Libya's Salafi community and forcing its members underground. Yet Libyan Salafism continued to grow; Libyan Salafi figures recall smuggling audio recordings and pamphlets into the country after returning from the hajj pilgrimage.³³ Similarly, Libyan Salafi discourse continued to mature abroad, among the itinerant and scattered Libyan veterans of the Afghanistan war and the students and graduates of seminaries in Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.³⁴

By the early and mid-1990s, Libyan Salafis in Libya and abroad became partisans in the splits that emerged among Saudi Salafi clerical networks, starting especially with the purge of Muslim Brotherhood-aligned teachers from the Islamic University of Medina (the main hub for Saudi Salafi education for foreign students) and the rise of Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, allegedly with Saudi intelligence support, as a central figure in the Saudi regime's promotion of Salafi quietism.³⁵ Libyans partook in the key Salafi political and theological debates that defined these fissures: the establishment of the Islamic Emirate in Kunar, Afghanistan in 1990,³⁶ the basing of US troops on Saudi soil during the First Gulf War of 1990–91, and the 1991 Madrid peace conference between Israel and Palestine. During these debates, some Libyans, students of al-Albani or al-Madkhali, stayed loyal to the quietist line, while others followed Brotherhood-inspired *sahwa* or “awakening” clerics.

One of the most consequential fissures in the Libyan Salafi field, one that would reach its apogee during and after the 2011 revolution, occurred not in Saudi Arabia, but in Yemen. Attracted by the promise of free lodging and a rigorous education, dozens of Libyan Salafists had in the late 1990s gone to study with a Yemeni quietist preacher named Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi'i at his guesthouse and seminary, the Dar al-Hadith, in the town of Dammaj in Yemen's Saada governorate. A towering figure in modern Salafism, al-Wadi'i's views on eschewing politics in favor of *da'wa* and charity were similar in some respects to those of Madkhali (both had studied under al-Albani at the Islamic University of Medina), but unlike al-Madkhali, al-Wadi'i was a sharp critic of the Saudi government's policies, though he later reconciled with the monarchy, toward the end of his life.³⁷ After al-Wadi'i's death in 2001, a schism erupted among his intellectual heirs, centered around one of his prominent students, a cleric named Abu al-Hassan al-Ma'ribi.³⁸ Al-Ma'ribi had adopted a more supportive position

toward political participation that was closer, critics said, to the position of the Muslim Brotherhood and of *sahwa* clerics like Salman al-Awda.³⁹ In the ensuing debates among the alumni of al-Wadi'i's seminary, Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali himself weighed in with books and pamphlets against al-Ma'ribi from his position at the Islamic University of Medina.⁴⁰ Libyan Salafis were divided as well, between those who supported al-Wadi'i and al-Madkhali and those who backed the more activist stance propagated by al-Ma'ribi (derided by their opponents as "Ma'ribis").⁴¹ And as the Libyan graduates of al-Wadi'i's seminary returned to Libya in 2002, the fissures between the so-called Ma'ribis and the Madkhalis were felt in mosques and discussion circles—but they reached their highest point in the Salafi responses to the 2011 revolution and its aftermath.⁴²

All of this took place alongside a burgeoning alignment between Gaddafi and Saudi intelligence over suppressing the activist and Salafi-jihadist currents while co-opting more loyalist figures. In 1995, to portray himself as a patron of piety, Gaddafi dispatched a planeload of Libyan hajj pilgrims to Mecca.⁴³ In early 1998, following a meeting of Arab intelligence chiefs in Tunis and the subsequent visit to Libya by the Saudi interior minister at the time, Prince Muhammad bin Nayef, Saudi Arabia took a harder approach toward Libyan Salafists—of all shades—residing in the Kingdom. In April of that year, Riyadh expelled a number of Libyan Salafi figures living in Mecca and Medina. Some were members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, but many others were simply Libyan students who had overstayed their visas. Some of the Libyans were transferred back to Libya intelligence custody via a Libyan ship (originally carrying Libyan hajj pilgrims but repurposed for the return voyage to ferry prisoners back to Libya). Many were then incarcerated at the notorious Abu Slim prison in Tripoli.⁴⁴

Yet roughly this same year, Gaddafi's policies toward Salafism shifted. Realizing that the apolitical, progovernment, and "quietist" strains of Salafism could be a useful bulwark for his regime against political Islamists and jihadists, Gaddafi moved from a policy of monitoring to co-opting and supporting Salafism. Multiple Salafi sources alleged that this was due to the influence of Egyptian intelligence, which by this time had developed its strategy for playing different Islamist strands against each other. Regardless of how it came about, the impact of this shift was felt immediately in Libya. The Gaddafi regime loosened its restrictions on Libyans studying Salafism abroad, albeit for clerics with a more quietist bent who subscribed to the ideas of al-Albani, bin Baz, and al-Madkhali in Saudi Arabia and Muqbil al-Wadi'i in Yemen.⁴⁵ By 2002, Salafi books and cassettes were being allowed into Libya. Starting in 2003, with the permission of the Libyan domestic intelligence agency, Libyan Salafists returning from Saudi Arabia and Yemen were allowed to work as imams and khatibs in mosques.⁴⁶ The result of

all of this was a tremendous expansion for Salafism, albeit with close regime supervision. “The *manabar* (mosque pulpits) were overflowing with Salafism,” remembers one practicing Salafi in Tripoli.⁴⁷

Much of this co-option was intended to supplement the program of theological revisions undertaken by imprisoned LIFG members and overseen by Gaddafi's London-educated son, Saif al-Islam. Saif himself cultivated links to more activist, non-Madkhali, but still-loyal Saudi clerics, such as Salman al-Awda and Aidh al-Qarni, inviting both of them to Libya in 2010 to give speeches in the context of Saif's rehabilitation of imprisoned jihadists.⁴⁸ In the case of Madkhalism, however, another son, Saadi, appeared to have been the main shepherd for its growing influence in Libya—to the point where some Libyans today refer to the Madkhalis as “Jamaat Saadi” or “Saadi's Faction.”⁴⁹ Saadi's personal convictions regarding Salafism are the subject of debate and speculation. According to one Salafi eyewitness, he met Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali in Saudi Arabia during the hajj pilgrimage in 1995.⁵⁰ Others allege that he was initially closer to Abu Hassan al-Ma'ribi's supporters in Libya.⁵¹ Multiple Salafi sources contend that a Libyan Madkhali figure residing in Tripoli but hailing from the east named Muhammad Nazal al-Qatrani (nicknamed Abu Abdallah al-Abyari) proved instrumental in converting Saadi to Madkhali Salafism.⁵² Still other Salafis contend that his arrival to Salafism coincided with a personal crisis after his suspension from an Italian football team for failing a drug test. What seems mostly likely is that a mixture of personal conviction by Saadi and, starting in the 2000s, regime instrumentalism—directed by Gaddafi—played a role.

As Madkhalism spread widely in Libya during the early and middle 2000s, it did so without regard for geography or class. Some Libyan Salafi sources ascribe a poorer, tribal background to Madkhalis, asserting that their influence is felt among urban areas that are inhabited by first- or second-generation migrants from rural areas. In Tripoli, one Salafi adherent related, they are present in neighborhoods of Ghut al-Shaal, Draybi, Hadba, and Abu Slim, especially among the public-housing complexes constructed by Gaddafi to accommodate recent arrivals from the hinterland. Similarly, in Misrata, a municipal official with ties to the Salafis related that Madkhalis had secured their strongest influence in parts of the city that comprised mixed families from “outside” Misrata, to include public-housing areas near the Iron and Steel Company, Qasr al-Ahmed, and Al-Jazira. In neighborhoods and suburbs with more social homogeneity—such as Zawiyat al-Mahjub, where Sufi influence is linked to a more prominent or “noble” Misratan family—the Salafis found it harder to penetrate.⁵³

Multiple Salafi and non-Salafi sources also point to the Madkhalis' role in forming economic cooperatives in businesses and trades, which involved

the pooling and sharing of capital based on mutual trust and group solidarity, which adherence to Madkhalism provided. These include the distribution of bottled water and baked bread, as well as the operation of car rental agencies.⁵⁴

None of this can be corroborated by any reliable data. Today, Madkhali Salafis are present in the east, west, and south, in urban areas, mountains, and the desert. Some do indeed hail from poorer economic backgrounds, but some are also wealthy. Madkhali Salafi affiliation often divides Libyan families. Madkhalis are also inclusive of ethnolinguistic diversity. For example, a key Madkhali figure in western Libya today is an ethnic Amazigh named Majdi Hafala.⁵⁵ Madkhalism can also in some instances bridge communal divides that are usually marked by antagonism: for example, a Madkhali armed group in the southeast city of Kufra called the Subul al-Salam Brigade includes ethnic Arabs and Tabu.

There is also no reliable data on the age of Madkhali figures, though several of its leaders today, including Hafala, are in their late thirties, having come of age in Saudi or Yemeni schools. Still other Madkhalis reportedly arrive at Salafism without formal education, often through self-study or after the hajj or umrah.⁵⁶ Given this socioeconomic and communal diversity, it seems likely that the most common dominator among Madkhalis, at least in the last years of the Gaddafi regime, was support for and patronage by the regime. In this sense, the growth of Madkhalism at the twilight of the Gaddafi period represented something of a nationalization project, designed to create an indigenous class of Salafi adherents that could be controlled and deployed by the state—though Gaddafi himself never completely trusted their ties to Saudi Arabia, according to Libyan Madkhali sources.⁵⁷

The protests and later armed revolution against Gaddafi in early 2011 put this policy to the test and confronted followers of Madkhalism with stark choices. Early in the uprising, Gaddafi sought to capitalize on the investment he'd made in patronizing these loyalist Salafis by deploying them against the nascent protests. His son Saadi—who by now was reported to have grown a full beard in the manner proscribed by Salafis—spearheaded this mobilization, directing Madkhali sheikhs to send text messages on regime-controlled mobile networks. The Salafi leader Majdi Hafala, regarded then as the most senior of the Madkhali sheikhs, issued a fatwa urging citizens in Salafi terms to “remain steadfast” (*ilzam baytak*—literally “hold fast to your house”) and to not “break ranks with the legitimate ruler” (*kharuj ‘ala wali al-amr*), calling the protests the “*fitna* (strife) of al-Qaeda,” led by mercenaries.⁵⁸ Externally, Gaddafi tried to rally the support of Salafi clerics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. In March 2011, for example, reportedly through a phone call from Saadi, he sought religious backing from the popular

Saudi clerics Aidh al-Qarni and Salman al-Awda. Both rejected this plea; al-Qarni even issued a fatwa against Gaddafi, extolling those who died in the revolt against the dictator as “martyrs.”⁵⁹

For his part, the cleric Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, whose followers Gaddafi had long shored up as a bulwark against dissent, reportedly urged adherents in Libya to remain at home—to refrain from actively supporting both the regime and the rebels.⁶⁰ He remained silent throughout the revolution until October 2011, when he issued an audio recording, calling Gaddafi a “criminal” but warning against further *fitna*—advising Libyan Salafis not to participate in ongoing rebel operations against loyalist holdouts in the towns of Sirte and Bani Walid.⁶¹ In the end, many Madkhalis did in fact remain passive during the revolution. Some actively sided with Gaddafi. Sometimes the dilemma about whether to support the revolution caused splits along generational lines. For example, the son of one now-deceased Madkhali preacher from Benghazi remembers debating his father, telling him that to sit on the sidelines meant ceding initiative to competing Islamists. He stated: “I told my father, ‘Look, we have to do something. . . . We can’t just let the Muslim Brotherhood take over.’”⁶² In western Libya and Tripoli, some Salafis, motivated more by familial and local ties than ideology, joined the rebellion belatedly in the summer of 2011 and participated in a coordinated uprising in the capital on August 20.⁶³ Those Libyan Madkhalis who did stay loyal earned opprobrium after Gaddafi’s death from revolutionaries, especially from more activist and oppositional Islamist currents, like the Muslim Brotherhood. “We called them the ‘white chickens,’” said one Brotherhood activist, referring to their white, calf-length robes.⁶⁴

Yet in the wake of Libya’s subsequent decline into chaos, starting in 2013, the loyalist Madkhalis seized the moral high ground, arguing that they were prescient in their opposition to breaking ranks with Gaddafi. Those Salafis who had revolted came under the scrutiny of fellow Salafis. One of them admitted to the author in early 2019 that he keeps a photocopy of a statement from a senior Saudi cleric, Saleh al-Luhaydan, urging rebellion in 2011, as a sort of insurance card to show that his sedition was authorized at the time by a respected Salafi juridical reference.⁶⁵

SALAFISM AFTER GADDAFI: A REORDERING OF THE LANDSCAPE

The fall of Gaddafi and the sudden opening of Libyan politics proved to be a disorienting experience for Libya’s Salafis, confronting them with new choices about affiliation with the state and the use of violence. More than

the other countries discussed in this volume, this sudden break had a profound effect on the trajectory of Salafism. It produced what can best be described as a “recomposition” of the Salafi field that included the formation of Salafi political parties, the organization of Salafis into armed militias, and the expansion of Salafi influences into education and the media sphere.

Among the first major challenges were Libya’s preparations for the 2012 parliamentary elections, which occasioned great debate among Libya’s Salafis. On the one hand, some activist Salafis, influenced by the formation of Salafi parties in Tunisia and Egypt, supported elections and sought to participate in them. One Libyan Salafist party, the al-Asala (Authenticity), reportedly took its inspiration from Kuwait’s Al-Umma party.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the older generation of Salafi jihadists, especially the leadership within the LIFG, welcomed the 2012 elections and formed two parties, al-Watan, led by Abd al-Hakim Bilhaj, and al-Umma al-Wasat, led by Sami Saadi.⁶⁷

Overall, however, the majority of Libyan Madkhalis rejected the 2012 elections and the legislature it produced—the General National Congress—as heretical, partly because it included more activist and rival Islamist currents such as the Brotherhood.⁶⁸ Those Salafis who did participate in the elections struggled, like many political parties, to formulate a coherent platform and agenda. They faced stiff competition from the Muslim Brotherhood and from a cross-ideological coalition, the National Forces Alliance, often erroneously referred to in the media as “secular.” Their popularity was further hindered by their jihadist histories or their association with the former regime. Many Libyans wondered what the Salafis were actually bringing to a country that was already socially conservative, favoring instead those with technocratic backgrounds over the Salafis’ slogans of piety.⁶⁹ The voting results only confirmed their worst fears: among the ex-LIFG cadre, only one Salafi candidate, the Umma al-Wasat political figure Abd al-Wahab al-Qaid, from the southern town Murzuq, won a seat on the organized party lists.⁷⁰ Bilhaj’s much-trumpeted al-Watan party secured none. Roughly twenty Salafis, mostly from the al-Asala, obtained seats as independents.⁷¹

The next major turning point for Libya’s Salafis was the parliamentary debate in early 2013 over a controversial piece of legislation, the Political Isolation Law, which sought to exclude broad swaths of Libyans from future government employment based a sweeping definition of complicity with the former regime. In successive drafts, the circle of guilt expanded, to include student union leaders, economists, former military officers, and even those who had broken with Gaddafi or tried to work for reform from within.⁷² It drew support from a loose coalition of Islamists as well as from revolutionary towns like the western port city of Misrata, which had

endured a vicious, months-long siege in 2011. Among the Salafis and other Islamists, there were splits. The former LIFG leader Abd al-Hakim Bilhaj opposed the law, telling the author that in enacting an exclusionary law, Libyans “needed to distinguish between those who worked for the Gaddafi system (*nitham*) and for the state (*dawla*).”⁷³ Yet another former LIFG Salafi luminary, the Umma al-Wasat politician Abd al-Wahhab al-Qaid, played a singular role in spearheading the law.⁷⁴

In May 2013, the law finally passed, to an international outcry and the dismay of many Libyans. Though the majority of Libyans expressed support for some sort of lustration, this was too much for many. The law had far-reaching effects on Libya's subsequent fracturing, sharpening the lines between Islamists and their opponents and between towns and groups that had benefited from Gaddafi's patronage and those that sought a complete remaking of the old order. More importantly, because the law had passed with pressure from militias, it demonstrated the growing vulnerability of elected institutions to increasingly formidable armed groups, including those with an Islamist and Salafi orientation.⁷⁵

Aside from their entry into politics, Salafis in Libya appeared as a major force in its armed groups or militias.⁷⁶ The proliferation of these groups has been a major destabilizing factor in Libya since the revolution, though their origins and types are diverse. Many armed groups formed spontaneously during the 2011 uprising along town or even neighborhood lines and later grew in strength through foreign support. Still, others developed after the revolution, when the transitional authorities started diverting oil funds to the armed groups, resulting in a swelling of the militias' ranks. The current struggle today in Libya is in large measure a scramble by political elites and militias, to include those with a Madkhali orientation, for control of these funds.

Some of the armed groups could be said to fulfill the role of community policing in their respective towns. But many became predatory and heavily involved in abuses like smuggling and torture.⁷⁷ Others grabbed oil fields, airports, ministries, and ports to use as strategic leverage with the weak transitional government. And as Libya's political divisions widened, the militias aligned themselves with political factions and their foreign patrons. Underpinning all this is the weakness of the regular army and police, which had been gutted by years of institutional neglect by Gaddafi.⁷⁸

Among Islamist and Salafi armed groups, several types existed. A more moderate camp consisted of groups formed during the revolution with foreign aid and support (usually from Qatar), led by former LIFG figures like Bilhaj. As was discussed previously, most supported the new state and elections. The second constellation of jihadists comprised younger men in their twenties and early thirties and ex-prisoners from Abu Slim, who

rejected the new state and the principle of elections as *shirk* (polytheism) and *bida'* (innovation). Before associating with the state, they argued, there needed to be Islamic law in place. "Under Gaddafi, the army protected the *taghut* (tyrant)," one of their clerical sympathizers stated, "and to ensure that the army will not be used against the people or Muslims, we need an Islamic constitution in place."⁷⁹

At the center of this trend was the Salafi jihadist militia Ansar al-Sharia, formed in Benghazi in mid-2011 by Muhammad al-Zahawi, a former appliance store owner and ex-Abu Slim prison inmate.⁸⁰ Drawing inspiration from the rise of like-minded groups in neighboring Tunisia, Ansar al-Sharia followed the ideological model put forward by the noted al-Qaeda luminary Muhammad al-Maqdisi, which privileged armed struggle while emphasizing the peaceful consolidation of power through proselytization, education, and organization.⁸¹ In Benghazi, Ansar al-Sharia put these teachings into practice through a program of charity and social services like clinics, youth camps, and antidrug campaigns.⁸²

Yet aside from this face of public works, the group had a darker side. Starting in mid-2012, Ansar al-Sharia set up training camps to the south of Benghazi for young Libyans and foreigners, especially Tunisians, wishing to fight abroad. It provided logistics for al-Qaeda's affiliates in the Sahara, the Sinai, and the Arabian Peninsula.⁸³ By late 2012, Ansar al-Sharia was helping Libyan jihadists travel to fight in Syria; many would later return to form the Libyan branch of the Islamic State, along with an influx of foreigners, especially Tunisians, and Libyan defections from Ansar al-Sharia.⁸⁴

Though Libya's jihadists like Ansar al-Sharia and the Islamic State have historically seized the attention of outside media, the most powerful category of Islamist armed groups are those affiliated with Madkhali Salafis. In contrast to the Salafi-jihadist rejectionists, they supported the political authorities of the new state on the basis of doctrinal loyalty to the *wali al-amr*, though they sought greater space to pursue *da'wa* and, unlike Bilhaj and his cohort, opposed elections. Many Madkhali armed groups emerged in late 2011 and early 2012 under the nominal authority of the Ministry of Interior, acting to supplement the weak police in policing the capital, tackling illegal drugs but also prostitution and alcohol. A strong tone of Islamic morality underpinned these policing tasks, justified on the basis of the Islamic precept of "commanding right and forbidding wrong."⁸⁵ This narrative of "combating crime" intensified among Madkhali armed groups as Libya's fragmentation worsened.

Among the most formidable of these Salafi militias-turned-police to develop in the capital is the Special Deterrence Force, led by a former metalworker and Salafi named Abdelraouf Kara.⁸⁶ Based at Tripoli's Matiga Airport, the militia is drawn primarily from youth from the surrounding

neighborhood of Suq al-Jumaa, a longtime bastion of Islamist piety and revolutionary opposition to Gaddafi. It is this local link that primarily defines the character of the Special Deterrence Force rather than its purely Salafi outlook—roughly 60% of its members are believed to be practicing Salafis from the Madkhali current, according to one interlocutor close to the group.⁸⁷ Moreover, in recent years, it has become increasingly fractured and can be said to be less a coherent ideological force than an umbrella for several highly personalized subunits with various economic interests.⁸⁸

The origins of the Deterrence Force lie in the latter stages of the revolution, when the youth of Suq al-Jumaa formed clandestine cells that rose on August 20 and later established themselves as militias at Matiga Airport, with support from Islamists backed by Qatar. Kara's militia initially focused on hunting down Gaddafi loyalists but then switched to combat the influx of illicit drugs.⁸⁹ He later broke with his erstwhile Islamist allies and, with funds from the Ministry of Interior, quickly established himself as a major power broker in the capital.

Though Tripoli residents supported the antivice activities of Kara's force and other Salafi militias, many were also alarmed by a wave of Salafi attacks that occurred from late 2011 to mid-2013 against Libya's Sufi heritage—to include shrines, mosques, libraries, and graves. Doctrinally, the Madkhalis justified these attacks as preventing polytheism (Salafis regard the Sufis' veneration of saints and other practices as a form of idolatry and intercession, threatening the principle of *tawhid*, or monotheism).⁹⁰ Much of the destruction was overseen by Ministry of Interior security forces, demonstrating a level of Salafi sympathy inside the ranks of the police and militia-turned-police, like the Deterrence Force. Abdelraouf Kara tried to distance himself from the attacks, stating in an interview that while his men had participated, he himself had not ordered the assault.⁹¹

As Libya's political divisions widened and as successive schemes for disarming and demobilizing the armed groups failed, the Madkhali militias gained in power. They received a major boost with the outbreak of civil war in 2014.

MADKHALIS IN LIBYA'S CIVIL WAR, 2014 TO THE PRESENT

The causes of Libya's post-2011 civil war are complex and varied, resulting from unresolved disputes over the Political Isolation Law, the politicization of the militias, regional meddling, debates about the inclusion of Islamists in political power, and factional conflicts over the control of the security sector and, especially, the distribution of oil wealth. The most proximate

cause was a rapid decline in security in Benghazi and eastern Libya in late 2013 and 2014, attributed partially to an escalation in jihadist violence, which anti-Islamists contend was abetted and tolerated by Brotherhood and Salafist figures in the Tripoli parliament.

The violence picked up in the summer of 2012, when jihadists attacked a series of Western diplomatic targets, culminating in the September 11–12 attack on the US diplomatic outpost in Benghazi that killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.⁹² By 2013, the killings had shifted to Libyans: former security officers and judges, as well as outspoken activists and journalists.⁹³ While some of this was ideological, much of it must be seen in the context of criminality and tribal vendettas and, especially, revenge by Islamists (particularly ex-Abu Slim inmates) for the regime's repression in the 1990s.⁹⁴

By 2013, the jihadists' growing power was abetted by worsening political polarization in Libya. In neighboring Egypt, the overthrow of the elected Muslim Brotherhood president Muhammad al-Mursi by General Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi and the massacre of Brotherhood members and supporters in the summer of 2013 contributed to the hardening and radicalization of Libyan Islamists in Libya. Across the region, the declining fortunes of Brotherhood networks were felt in Libya: prostate, moderate figures within the Islamist militias ranks became steadily marginalized, while radicals ascended, especially in Benghazi. The capture by US forces of the wanted al-Qaeda suspect Abu Anas al-Libi in late 2013 added further grist for the radical voices who accused the weak Libyan prime minister of selling out Libyan sovereignty. In Benghazi, pragmatic figures from prostate militias like Rafallah al-Sahati Companies and the February 17 Brigade fled the city, while hardliners within the Ansar al-Sharia militia and another armed group called the Libya Shield gained the upper hand. The tenuous cooperation between Islamist brigades and uniformed security forces unraveled as assassinations and vigilantism increased.

By early 2014, many Benghazi residents, along with anti-Islamist currents and eastern tribes, secretly hoped that a Sisi-like figure would arrive to restore order to the city and, more importantly, to remove Islamists, especially the Brotherhood, from Libyan politics.⁹⁵ In May 2014, such a figure arrived in the form of Khalifa Haftar, septuagenarian general and onetime ally of Gaddafi who had defected in the 1980s during the Chad war and became a CIA asset before living in exile in northern Virginia for nearly twenty years.⁹⁶ In 2011, he returned to Libya in an unsuccessful bid to seize the reigns of the armed revolution. Retiring from the limelight for several years, he re-emerged in the midst of Libya's growing polarization, skillfully on the grievances of eastern tribes and disaffected military units. With this support, he launched a military operation in Benghazi, ostensibly designed

to restore security and eliminate the Islamist militias.⁹⁷ But a broader and less explicit goal was to dismantle the General National Congress in Tripoli, which he asserted had overstayed its mandate and whose Islamist legislators were funding extremist armed groups in the east.

Dubbed “Operation Dignity,” Haftar’s campaign set in motion a chain of events that would cascade across the country into civil war. In July of that year, partly out of the fear that Haftar was preparing to assault the capital, revolutionary factions and Islamists in and around Tripoli launched an attack on the capital’s international airport, which evolved into the so-called Libya Dawn operation.⁹⁸ By early 2015, Libya had effectively split in two. The eastern region allied with General Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) set up parallel political and economic institutions, while the western revolutionary and Islamists affiliated with Libya Dawn established their own governing authority, the National Salvation Government. Adding to the turmoil, regional powers sent arms, money, and advisors to the warring factions: Qatar and Turkey backed the Dawn faction, while the UAE and Egypt backed General Haftar’s LNA. The UAE proved especially aggressive, sending airstrikes and special operations raids.⁹⁹

The role of Islamists and Salafis in this conflict is important and complex. Contrary to popular opinion, the battle lines were not strictly between Islamists (Libya Dawn in the west) and anti-Islamists (Haftar and his Dignity coalition). Instead, a myriad of identities, affiliations, and interests coalesced into two very loose camps, drawing from tribes, regional interests, and towns. Underpinning all this was a division over how much of the old order to preserve and how much remake and also how to distribute oil wealth—and Islamists were naturally part of this debate. In the east, the civil war, contrary to Haftar’s aims, actually strengthened the hardline jihadists: in launching his campaign, Haftar made no distinction—rhetorically and in practice—between rejectionist militias like Ansar al-Sharia and other Islamists who, while certainly not liberal, supported the Libyan state and could have been reconciled to it. The result of this lumping together was predictable: radical and moderate Islamists joined forces in a military coalition called the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) in the summer of 2014.¹⁰⁰

Another significant effect of the civil war in eastern Libya was the mobilization of Madkhali Salafists as armed political actors, moving well beyond their already established roles in the policing sector and social sphere. At first glance, this politicization would seem to be a paradox among the so-called quietist Salafis—at least in theory, the Madkhalis were supposed to eschew political activism. Yet across the country, the Libyan Madkhalis joined in factional battles, demonstrating the inadequacy of terms like “quietism” when describing this Salafi current in the Libyan milieu. Many

justified the taking of arms by citing statements from their clerical referents in Saudi Arabia and doctrinal imperatives of “fighting disbelief” or “commanding right and forbidding wrong.”¹⁰¹

But a degree of nuance is needed here. In many cases, Saudi clerical pronouncements were highly ambiguous, leaving it up to Libyan adherents to interpret them. This is especially true for Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, who in some instances expressly forbade participation in Libya’s fighting among certain segments of Libya’s Salafi communities—namely those that were not directly threatened. For example, at the start of Operation Dignity, Salafis in western Libyan dispatched a former Libyan student of al-Madkhali’s to meet with the Saudi cleric and solicit his advice about Haftar. His response, according to the Libyan source, was that Libyan Salafis should only bear arms to defend themselves and their particular territory, rather than joining in a distant conflict in their country that did not directly concern them.¹⁰² In early 2015, al-Madkhali followed this up with a public fatwa forbidding participation in the broader Dawn-Dignity conflict.¹⁰³

In 2016, however, Madkhali shifted his stance. That July, he publicly exhorted his Libyan followers to confront the Benghazi Defense Brigades, an offshoot of the Islamist BRSC coalition that had been battling Haftar. Importantly, his disparaging of the Defense Brigades as a Muslim Brotherhood group backed by Qatar shows how the broader Emirati and Saudi rivalry with Qatar reverberated in Libya.¹⁰⁴ But this exogenous factor should not be overstated at the expense of the agency of local Salafis. Specifically, his endorsement of fighting came in the context of yet another delegation to Saudi Arabia of Libyan Madkhali Salafists, this time from Benghazi, to seek a statement from the cleric supporting the Dignity operation.¹⁰⁵

More consequential than Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali’s pronouncements is the fact that Madkhalis across Libya are intimately tied to Libya’s cities, towns, and regions. Many of these communities joined the national Dawn-Dignity conflict for highly parochial reasons, often to gain leverage over communal and local rivals in the broader scramble for resources and power. In the east, these calculations were especially evident in the decision of local Salafis to join the fighting. To be sure, some Madkhalis conspired with Haftar before his May 2014 attack. But for many, the Dignity campaign presented them with a doctrinal dilemma about whether to mobilize militarily that some Salafi sources compared to the 2011 revolution.¹⁰⁶

A combination of social and political factors prompted them to take up arms. Since the revolution, many of them had chafed at the influence in eastern Libya of jihadist militias. One Madkhali cleric recalls performing *da’wa* in secret, in the Benghazi neighborhood of al-Laythi—a historic base for jihadist recruitment and, therefore, antipathy to the Madkhalis.¹⁰⁷ Others

cited the string of assassinations they had suffered at the hands of the Islamists and jihadists. A key incident that spurred many to fight for Haftar was the late 2013 killing of Colonel Kamal Bazaza, a Madkhali Salafist head of the Islamic Affairs department in the Benghazi Security Directorate, whose sermons enjoyed wide popularity.¹⁰⁸ As the war in Benghazi evolved, the Madkhalis became an increasingly prominent presence on the battlefield, earning a reputation as fierce fighters. Some joined an almost exclusively Madkhali armed group under LNA command, the Tawhid Battalion (later renamed the 210 Infantry Battalion), while others joined existing LNA units like the special forces. Still, others fought in pro-Dignity neighborhood militias, which came to be called the “support forces.”¹⁰⁹

By the late summer and early fall of 2017, after nearly three years of grinding urban warfare that reduced Benghazi's storied old city to ruins, Haftar's forces declared victory. The war had caused massive casualties and displaced thousands. Many of his Islamist opponents had died, but others fled to Misrata to the west and to desert bases southwest of Benghazi, where they regrouped. Meanwhile, in Benghazi and in the east, the military victory shifted the role of the armed Madkhali groups. The LNA undertook the disbanding and dispersal of some brigades to “numbered” LNA units. In many cases, though, this was simply a rebranding: Madkhali militias continue to exist as cohesive bodies, with some enjoying patronage and support from Haftar's sons, most notably Khaled, who integrated them into a well-equipped LNA unit he commanded, called the 106th Infantry Battalion.¹¹⁰ Some Madkhali units participated in Haftar's subsequent military campaigns against local Islamists, jihadists, and other forces in the eastern city of Dirna and across the oil crescent and the southern Fezzan region.¹¹¹ And, as will be discussed at length below, still other Madkhali militias assumed policing functions across the east and exerted influence on social norms and Islamic institutions, such as the ministry of *awqaf* (Islamic endowments).

Meanwhile, in late 2015, a tortuous, months-long UN-brokered peace process had produced a new Libyan transitional government that, at least in theory, was supposed to bridge the Dawn-Dignity divide, unify Libya's parallel political institutions, and end the civil war. But the agreement that was signed in the resort town of Skhirat, Morocco, in December 2015, was deeply flawed—specifically because it never included the Libyan armed groups with the preponderance of power on the ground. It also never received a full buy-in from the east, partly because Haftar's role in the new power structure remained unaddressed. Most importantly, perhaps, Haftar's Arab backers—the Emirates and Egypt—along with France and Russia, continued their clandestine military and financial support to the general and his parallel administration in the east. The result of all of this was that the new “unity”

government produced by the Skirat agreement, the Government of National Accord (GNA), was stillborn from the beginning. It arrived in Tripoli in early 2016 and immediately struggled to assert its authority beyond a few neighborhoods. Its governing structure was rife with political divisions and personality conflicts, especially with the Central Bank leadership over budget authority. It failed to deliver services across western and southern Libya.

But for the Madkhalis, the GNA proved to be a boon. As was noted earlier, the Madkhalis had suffered a blow with the rise of the Islamist-leaning National Salvation Government in late 2014, with several key Madkhali clerical figures fleeing the capital. The arrival of the GNA reversed this trend and allowed these figures to return. This was partly due to the fact that the GNA relied on Madkhali-leaning militias to protect itself and project its authority—a dependency that was abetted by the GNA’s international supporters.¹¹² In the ensuing years, these militias, along with other non-Madkhali groups, coalesced into a group of four or five “supermilitias” who amassed enormous wealth and privileges—effectively capturing the state by colonizing ministries and preying on government coffers.

The aforementioned Special Deterrence Force led by Abdelraouf Kara has been at the center of this militia behemoth. The GNA has relied on it for security, especially in guarding the Central Bank and in transporting foreign currency from Matiga Airport to the bank. For their part, Western backers of the GNA have also adopted a tolerant and even favorable view of the Deterrence Force, especially as the militia shifted to counterterrorism—another narrative that has been successfully trumpeted through its media outlets.¹¹³ Much of the force’s counterterrorism work has been focused on unraveling clandestine Islamic State cells in the capital and in the western region—particularly after an early 2016 attack on the Corinthia Hotel, a favorite of Western diplomats and businesspeople, and a US airstrike on an ISIS training camp in the western town of Sabratha.¹¹⁴ In mid-2017, the Deterrence Force arrested the older brother of Salman Abedi, a twenty-two-year-old Briton of Libyan descent who blew himself up in the name of the Islamic State in Manchester in May 2017, killing twenty-two people at a concert.¹¹⁵ The militia also runs a massive prison on its airport compound—largely beyond any judicial oversight, where Madkhali Special Deterrence Force personnel conduct a “rehabilitation” program that is part jobs training and part theological re-education, designed both to prepare inmates for re-entry into society and to convince them of the illegitimacy of violent acts against a lawful ruler, using an array of Salafi texts from Saudi clerics like al-Albani and al-Fawzan.¹¹⁶ One such detainee, a Libyan Islamic State member and veteran of the Syrian jihad, described the program as emphasizing the “stories” (or context) behind the Hadiths that the Islamic State appropriated to justify its violence.¹¹⁷

All of this support—from the GNA and Western backers—has taken place against the backdrop of the more doctrinaire Salafi aspects of the Deterrence Force's policing, often undertaken by hardline subfactions and currents rather than ordered by Kara himself. As discussed at length below, Deterrence Force personnel have been involved in the harassment or detention of activists and artists whom they deem un-Islamic.¹¹⁸ Moreover, recent UN reports have implicated Deterrence Force personnel in migrant trafficking, belying Kara's Salafist claim of noncorruptibility.¹¹⁹

Elsewhere in Libya, outside Tripoli, the civil war and foreign counterterrorism agendas have also increased Madkhali power. This dynamic is especially evident in the central coastal city of Sirte, where, in 2014, the Islamic State established its strongest base in Libya. In the spring of 2016, a coalition of Libyan militias, mostly from Misrata, launched an attack on Sirte to dislodge the terrorist group. Backed by American air power and Western special forces, the campaign, dubbed Bunyan al-Marsus, lasted nearly seven months and resulted in the loss of over seven hundred anti-Islamic State Libyan fighters. One of the militias that fought alongside the Misratan coalition was a Madkhali Salafist armed group called the 604th Infantry Battalion, which had been formed initially from Sirte-based Firjani tribesmen who had fled the city in summer 2015 after the Islamic State had brutally crushed an uprising by the Firjan tribe in Sirte's Neighborhood Three (sparked by the killing of a popular Madkhali Salafist preacher from the tribe). Receiving arms and armored vehicles from like-minded Madkhali Salafist militias in Tripoli such as Abdelraouf Kara's Special Deterrence Force as well as another Tripoli-based militia, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion, the 604th trained throughout late 2015 and early 2016, waiting for its chance for revenge.¹²⁰ Fighting alongside Bunyan al-Marsus meant that the 604th's relations with militias from Misrata were sometimes strained: the Misratans, after all, had attacked and wreaked havoc in Sirte during and after the 2011 revolution. Moreover, the 604th drew support from fighters in Bani Walid, Zintan, and Sabha—towns that also had troubled relations with Misrata.¹²¹ The 604th's Salafi character also sat uneasily with some Misrata militias—many of whom were pious and conservative but not predisposed toward Islamism, whether from the Brotherhood or from Salafism.¹²²

After the fall of the Islamic State, tensions with the Misratans increased as the 604th took over policing functions in liberated Sirte.¹²³ Within several months, it quickly emerged as the strongest security actor in the city, enforcing Salafi social mores, setting up its own Salafi schools, taking over media outlets, and replacing mosque imams with Salafis.¹²⁴ More important, though, are Misrata's suspicions about the 604th's collusion with Haftar given that the majority of the members in its ranks hail from Haftar's tribe, the Firjan. Foreign and Libyan media outlets routinely report that the

604th battalion would act as an advance guard, or a sort of Trojan Horse, for Haftar's forces in the event the LNA attacks Sirte.¹²⁵ Yet in an interview, a prominent commander in the 604th denied this, stating that he told Haftar's Benghazi-based Salafi allies, the 210 Infantry Battalion, not to aid any attack by Haftar against the 604th's (uneasy) allies in Sirte—such an attack on Sirte by the Madkhalis would be an undesirable “political war” (*harb siyasiya*), whereas assisting Haftar's war against the BRSC and ISIS was legitimate—a war on the *khawarij*, or deviants, from Islam (i.e., the Brotherhood).¹²⁶ While such statements cannot be corroborated, they highlight how affinities to town and tribe can temper Madkhali influence across Libya.

Southern Libya (Fezzan) has also seen an expansion of Madkhali armed power and social clout, again, largely driven by the civil war and factional conflict. In the provincial southern capital of Sabha, for example, a major smuggling nexus and source of contention between warring communal groups, Salafist-leading militias worked closely with the Sabha Security Directorate and developed direct links with Salafi armed actors in western Libya, such as Kara's Deterrence Force at Tripoli's Matiga Airport. With the arrival of the anti-Haftar Misratan-led militias to Sabha in 2015, ostensibly to provide security, the Salafists' power grew, especially in prisons, where they conducted Qur'an-based rehabilitation for inmates accused of drunkenness and other social infractions.¹²⁷ East of Sabha, in the oasis town of Kufra, a Salafist brigade named the Subul al-Salam, dominated by Arabs from the Zway tribe but also ethnic Tabu, has seized control of contraband and migrant smuggling networks and has funneled them north to Salafi militias in coastal towns west of Tripoli, according to the United Nations.¹²⁸ It was also allegedly involved in the destruction of the grave of a prominent Sufi sheikh.¹²⁹

In early 2019, Madkhali Salafis in Libya's south received another boost as Haftar's LNA moved into the region, ostensibly to provide security and safeguard oil facilities. Accomplished largely through payments or promises of cash and the provision of materiel to southern communities and tribes, the sweep included a number of Madkhali Salafi militias, from both the east and the south. In tandem, the LNA had begun secret negotiations with communities in and around Tripoli, to include Madkhali Salafis.¹³⁰ Madkhali factions along the western seaboard, especially in the towns of Sabratha and Surman, were said to be receiving funds and possibly weapons from Haftar's camp.¹³¹ Even in Misrata, a town normally known for its opposition to Haftar, a growing Madkhali presence reportedly played a role in the warming of the city's ties to Haftar.¹³² Haftar's goal in this outreach this was to effect a swift and possibly bloodless entry into the capital, topple the GNA, and seize power for himself.

On April 4, 2019, Haftar's forces launched a brazen attack on Tripoli, subverting a painstaking UN-brokered roadmap to replace the GNA via a national conference and elections. Haftar had planned on using the threat of overwhelming force, along with the secret alliances he'd built in and around Tripoli, to win over holdouts and fence-sitters to his side. To his surprise, however, disparate militias, some of whom had long opposed the GNA, unified against him—though the cooperation among them is marked by suspicion. For their part, Madkhali armed groups adopted an ambiguous approach. Those that had received prior support from Haftar, such as the Madkhali-leaning Wadi (Valley) Brigade in Sabratha, sided with the LNA.¹³³ But social and political pressures within some towns, along with broader Libyan public opinion, constrained their behavior and limited their combat contribution to Haftar's forces. In the case of Sabratha, Madkhali Salafi emissaries from outside the town arrived before April 4 and tried to dissuade Sabrathan Madkhalis from taking action that would endanger the community. "I told the Salafis, 'you are surrounded by GNA supporters, you can't survive a siege,'" said one of these emissaries in an interview. "If you want to participate with Haftar go to the mountains but don't open a front in the city," he continued.¹³⁴ Echoing this, a prominent pro-GNA militia commander from Zawiya, a neighboring town east of Sabratha, met with the pro-LNA Madkhali Salafi commander of Sabratha's Wadi Brigade, Musa al-Najem, just prior to Haftar's attack. The two sides agreed not to open a front between the two towns in the event of war. As of the summer of 2019, this pact has so far been honored, even though fighters and armed groups from both towns, including Madkhalis, have participated in combat on other fronts.¹³⁵

In Tripoli, the most significant Madkhali-leaning force, the Deterrence Force, adopted a similarly ambiguous stance. The question of proper loyalty reportedly divided the Madkhalis within the force, some regarding Haftar as the *wali al-amr al-mataghalib* (the *wali al-amr* with the preponderance of power), and others citing the GNA's (nominal) international support as evidence that it is the rightful *wali al-amr*. Non-Madkhali fighters under the force's structure¹³⁶ fought against Haftar's attack, but the main Salafi subunits held back.¹³⁷ In early June, however, this ambivalence toward the conflict shifted slightly when Mahmud Hamza, the commander of the Deterrence Force's "2020" unit—a SWAT-type formation comprising many Madkhali adherents—sent some of his fighters to the front. The move was rooted partly in doctrine and clerical validation from Saudi Arabia, but more importantly in pressure from other Tripoli militias and also the realization that Haftar was not going to enter Tripoli anytime soon.¹³⁸

In Misrata, Madkhalis generally supported the city's popular mobilization against Haftar, even if they did not participate directly in combat in

Tripoli.¹³⁹ In other towns, such as Zawiya and Zintan, splits over whether or not to support Haftar reverberated among Madkhalis as well. Prominent figures like Majdi Hafala and Tariq Durman have largely stayed silent.¹⁴⁰ In Sirte, the 604th Battalion continues to lay low, though there are continuing suspicions among its erstwhile Misratan allies that it is secretly siding with Haftar. What seems likely is that the 604th could shift alliances depending on which faction is predominant political and military power in the region.

Contrary to some claims, a meeting between Haftar and Saudi Arabia's King Salman in Riyadh before the April 4 attack did not guarantee him active Madkhali military support in western Libya for the LNA's advance. As of this writing, Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali has not issued a statement, though some Libyan Salafis have reposted earlier pronouncements in favor of the LNA.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Egyptian Madkhali clerics have been especially vociferous, applauding Haftar's attack as a war against the *khawarij* (deviants) and urging Libyan Salafis to support him. They have also attacked Libyan Salafis for their prevarication or opposition to Haftar.¹⁴² But overall, foreign and especially Saudi clerical influences appear to have had a minimal effect on Libyan Madkhali Salafi behavior during this latest war. Instead, Libyan Madkhali armed groups have been influenced by their social ties with neighborhoods and towns, as well as the imperative to defend their economic interests and preserve political leverage among whoever emerges as the dominant authority at the end of the conflict.¹⁴³ Taken in sum, these dynamics demonstrate, once again, how a seemingly immutable and "imported" ideology is shaped by local context.¹⁴⁴

MADKHALISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Across the country, the Madkhalis' involvement in the political civil war is accompanied by a growing presence in the media, in education, and in the religious sphere. As noted previously, this influence intensified in the wake of the 2011 revolution and has increased in recent years. Today, Madkhalis sponsor hundreds of young Libyans for umrah and hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia, where they are sensitized and socialized to Madkhali doctrine. Madkhali radio stations and religious schools have proliferated, and, as noted, Madkhalis are trying to displace traditional Sufi and Maliki institutions.¹⁴⁵ Madkhalis are using armed force or the threat of it to enforce Salafi social conservatism, opposing musical venues, art festivals, standards of women's dress they deem un-Islamic, and the public mixing of genders.

Overlying this struggle for Libyan society and religious institutions is a long-standing intra-Islamist factional contest—at once doctrinal, social, and

political—with supporters of the grand mufti of Libya, Sadeq al-Ghariani, a prominent Muslim cleric and scholar who supported the 2011 revolution and was appointed by the transitional authorities as the head of the Tripoli Dar al-Ifta. Hailing from the Tripoli suburb of Tajura, al-Ghariani's Islamist leanings are hard to decipher. They are perhaps best described as a mix of activist Salafism (he backed the Asala party during the 2012 elections) and Maliki thought, tinged with jihadism and sympathy for Brotherhood-linked factions, former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council.¹⁴⁶ According to one close observer, he previously “resembled a Muslim Brother, wearing a suit and sporting a close-cropped beard and a British education.” Today, however, “he is Salafi in *aqida* (creed) but Maliki in his *manhaj* (practice).”¹⁴⁷ What is clear is that he and his constellation of supporters are implacable foes of the Madkhalis.

The Madkhalis' struggle with Ghariani and his Islamist allies or sympathizers began shortly after the revolution, when Madkhalis increased their presence “on the street”—through the establishment of private schools, the distribution of books, and their control of *manabar* (pulpits) in neighborhood mosques—sometimes through force.¹⁴⁸ But al-Ghariani's adherents and sympathizers, whom the Madkhalis deride as *mukhalaf* (roughly, “contradictory”) or “Ma'ribis” (referring to the aforementioned schism with the Yemen-based cleric), maintained control of the endowment offices in Tripoli.¹⁴⁹ The struggle has been waged in the media, with activist Islamist television outlets (those linked with former LIFG figures, Ghariani, or the Brotherhood) deploying the term “Madkhali” starting in late 2013 to denigrate the loyalist and quietist-leaning Salafis as foreign agents, receiving orders from Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁰ As noted earlier, with the capture of Tripoli in 2014 by Dawn forces aligned with Ghariani, this propaganda war escalated. On the ground, the Madkhalis suffered a sharp blow, and many of their figures fled to Zintan and other towns opposed to Dawn. But from late 2016 to early 2017, this shifted. Tripoli armed groups affiliated with the GNA, some of them with Madkhali members, undertook a series of armed actions against remnants of the National Salvation Government and Ghariani's Islamist militia allies in Tripoli's southern districts, who included the BRSC and the BDB, as well as ex-LIFG figures.¹⁵¹ Madkhalis in Misrata undertook a similar effort. Within the space of a year, the balance of power in this intra-Islamist struggle tilted sharply in favor of the Madkhalis, with many of their key leaders returning to positions of prominence in the capital. The more revolutionary Islamists and Ghariani supporters were killed, imprisoned, or fled the country.¹⁵²

Throughout this factional contest, the aforementioned Special Deterrence Force has been the vanguard of the Madkhalis' ascendance in

and around Tripoli. In battling Ghariani and his Islamist allies, Kara has deployed the counterterrorism card: Ghariani has supported the BRSC, the Islamist militia coalition that fought Haftar in Benghazi—and that sometimes shared the front lines with the Islamic State. The effects of this rivalry—along with others—on stability in the capital have been profound, resulting in gun battles, nighttime raids, and attempted jailbreaks. One of the most polarizing and far-reaching incidents occurred in November 2016, when Kara’s forces—specifically a hardline Salafi subunit known as the Crime Fighting Apparatus—reportedly kidnapped and killed Nader al-Umrani, the head of the Ghariani-led Dar al-Ifta’s Islamic Research and Studies Council.¹⁵³ Subsequent investigations suggested the attacker was driven by Umrani’s frequent anti-Madkhali statements, though supporters of Umrani suggested it was undertaken at the direction of an Egyptian Salafist cleric, Haftar’s forces, or the United Arab Emirates.¹⁵⁴

Whatever the motive, the killing was a major escalation among Islamist actors in the capital. Among armed groups affiliated with or sympathetic to the BRSC, the murder fueled a desire for revenge, resulting in violent assaults against Kara’s prison. The Brotherhood, too, believed the lines of battle had been drawn. “We are at war,” said one noted Brotherhood member and former militia commander.¹⁵⁵ The killing of Umrani also fueled the perception, already widespread, that elements within Kara’s force were sympathetic with Haftar. Yet Kara’s response, in an early 2016 interview, was that he remained publicly loyal to the Tripoli government, even if his sympathies were divided. “I said, ‘God is Great!’ when Haftar attacked Ansar al-Sharia,” he stated. “But I can’t support him here in the capital because that would cause *fitna*.”¹⁵⁶ He added that, according to Salafi doctrine, “one is obligated to follow the strongest political authority in whatever territory one sits.”

In response to this violence and Madkhali assertiveness, the Tripoli Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs issued a statement banning eleven Madkhali preachers from preaching in the capital’s mosques.¹⁵⁷ Yet by 2018, the tide had turned in the favor of the Madkhalis in western Libya. In December of that year, the GNA prime minister appointed a Madkhali cleric named Mohammed Ahmed al-Abbani, who had previously served as the director of the *awqaf* office for the capital, as the director and chairman of the GNA-affiliated (and theoretically nationwide) Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Authority. This promotion, and the firing of the previous director—Abbas al-Qadi, who had served in the position since 2017—without any stated reason, was widely suspected to have arisen from Madkhali pressure, possibly from within the Deterrence Force.¹⁵⁸ More broadly, the Madkhalis were angered over Qadi’s allowing of the public commemoration of the *mawlid*—the holiday celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, which doctrinaire Salafis regard as heretical.¹⁵⁹

Another source of long-term concern for Libyans is that the country's rival authorities in both the east and the west have tacitly backed the Madkhalis as their allies, often for self-serving political ends. In the east, this dynamic is especially evident through Haftar's support of Madkhalis in his struggle against the UN-backed government in Tripoli. Yet many eastern residents privately wonder if the Madkhali Salafis have in fact become too powerful for Haftar to manage, calling into question the Madkhalis' doctrine of obedience to the *wali al-amr*. As noted in September 2015 by a pro-Haftar tribal notable from the eastern tribe of the Ubaydat in Tobruk, "We are with them [the Madkhalis] for now against the Brotherhood, but they are extremist. They keep secrets."¹⁶⁰ Moreover, some Madkhalis are not necessarily loyal to Haftar in the east but to the speaker of the House of Representatives or to the House of Representatives itself, demonstrating the political malleability of the concept of the *wali al-amr*.¹⁶¹

Liberals in Benghazi have been concerned about the growth of Madkhalism as a byproduct of Haftar's campaign: they acknowledge—sometimes bitterly—that they had backed Haftar to rid Benghazi of Islamists, not realizing that he would unleash Islamists of his own.¹⁶² Among the incidents they point to as evidence of Madkhalism's power is a decree in February 2017 by Haftar's military governor to ban Libyan women from traveling outside Libya without a *mahram*, or male chaperon—a decision that was praised by the eastern, Madkhali-controlled Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs.¹⁶³ A month later, on March 28, 2017, Madkhali militiamen affiliated with the 210 Infantry Battalion arrested three men planning an Earth Day celebration, on the basis that it was un-Islamic and linked to Freemasonry.¹⁶⁴ Other signs of Madkhali power include threats against outspoken liberal journalists, the destruction of Sufi sites, the arrests of musical singers, the confiscation of books deemed un-Islamic, and enforcement of dress codes among women. Madkhalis are also prominent in eastern prisons, where they focus on the theological indoctrination of prisoners, both from the BRSC and from the Islamic State. According to one Salafi cleric involved in these efforts, more than three to four hundred clerics have been commissioned by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs to engage with prisoners, usually for about four hours a week. The clerics use the texts of al-Madkhali and al-Albani to convince the prisoners of the error of their ways and prepare a report to the head of the prison.¹⁶⁵

External influences have helped the rise of Madkhalism in eastern Libya.¹⁶⁶ Several Saudi clerics have visited Haftar-controlled areas; the most prominent is a Saudi Madkhali preacher of Palestinian-Jordanian origin named Usama Utaybi, who visited in early 2017 at the invitation of Haftar's LNA and the eastern-based Ministry of Endowments and Islamic

Affairs.¹⁶⁷ In sermons across the east, Utaybi praised Haftar and denigrated the Brotherhood.¹⁶⁸ Yet his welcome across the east and elsewhere was not universal. His visit to the eastern city of Tobruk was canceled due to local opposition. Elsewhere, when Utaybi tried to tour the western Nafusa mountains, the Zintani Madkhali Salafi cleric Tariq Durman opposed his visit.¹⁶⁹

Taken in sum, the Tobruk and Zintan incidents against al-Utaybi demonstrate an important aspect of Madkhali influence in Libya: it is not omnipresent and unchecked and is often buffered by region and tribe, despite the Salafis' contention that they completely transcend these local affiliations. To be sure, there is coordination and communication between Salafi groups across the country. But just like other political and social entities, the Madkhali Salafists have found it difficult to extend their territorial reach across Libya's fragmented landscape. Relatedly, there is sometimes societal pushback against the Salafis' enforcement of draconian social norms—in the cases of the Earth Day arrest and the travel ban on women, a public outcry on social media contributed to a reversal or rescinding of the edicts. Similarly, there has been a strong public backlash against the Madkhalis' opposition to various public expressions of Sufism. In tandem with this public reaction, there have been modest official steps to curtail the Madkhalis' influence, reflecting the underlying unease felt by Haftar and his supporters about their power, as well as political rivalries in the east. For example, in April 2019, the prime minister for the Haftar-aligned eastern government, Abdullah al-Thani, issued a decree removing a Madkhali figure as director of the eastern *awqaf* and appointing a member of the Sufi sect, Abd Al-Matlub Al-Abyad, to replace him.¹⁷⁰

Some commentators have spoken of the Madkhali Salafis across Libya eventually cohering into a unified political force and dominating the country. To be sure, they are already implicitly, and in some cases explicitly, political, aligning with both the Haftar-led LNA and the GNA. But aside from a dispersed media network and some instances of communication and cooperation in western Libya, Madkhali armed groups remain circumscribed by Libya's factional and geographic divides. This is especially evident after Haftar's April 4 attack on Tripoli, which underscored the primacy of local context in shaping Madkhali behavior.

Recent ideological splits among the Madkhalis pose another challenge to their unity. The most salient fissure here is between Libyan adherents of another Saudi cleric, Muhammad Hadi al-Madkhali, who hails from the same Saudi tribe as Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, but who has criticized Rabi. The disagreement is mostly doctrinal, related to the insufficient application of the Madkhali precept of *al-jarh wat-ta'dil* (praise and criticism). Specifically,

Muhammad has accused followers of Rabi, especially a Saudi cleric named Ubayd ibn Jabiri, of being *saafiqat*—a contentious term meaning, roughly, merchants with no capital of their own, who rely on others' goods, or, in the case of Salafis, those who pretend clerical knowledge to unfairly obtain power. Within Libya, this schism has reverberated beyond doctrine and across the political and social sphere. In August 2012, for example, Muhammad issued a congratulatory statement to Libyan Madkhalis who had destroyed a Sufi mausoleum in the western town of Zlitan.¹⁷¹ In 2015, he offered the Madkhalis an explicit call to arms for Haftar's Dignity operation, whereas Rabi was more circumspect.¹⁷² Since Haftar's attack in Tripoli, Salafi sources indicated that support for Muhammed al-Madkhali came from Libya's eastern militias, though the eastern Dar al-Ifta is aligned with Rabi. Muhammad's backers are also found in pockets in the west, including the Tripoli neighborhoods of Ain Zara, Tajura, and Abu Slim.¹⁷³

Then there is the question of the Salafis' interest in governing directly and formally—and their ability to do so. While their commonplace label as “quietest” or “apolitical” no longer holds true, it seems unlikely that they will emerge as an explicitly political force at the national level. For now, they seem to benefit from a symbiotic and, in some cases, parasitic relationship with weak political authorities. This allows them to indirectly influence the state behind the scenes and to profit from access to its economic resources while retaining more public authority in the social and religious realm through the rubric of *da'wa* and in the policing sector, under the precept of “commanding right and forbidding wrong.” Moreover, their doctrinal beliefs concerning the impermissibility of democracy seem malleable, especially in the face of popular will: in both eastern and western Libya, Madkhalis have identified the *wali al-amr* as elected legislatures and local councils.

CONCLUSION: WHITHER MADKHALISM?

Salafism in Libya has been closely molded by Libya's postrevolutionary chaos, defined by the absence of national institutions, hyperlocalism, and the conduct of politics through armed force. Salafi jihadism has typically attracted the most Western attention, and indeed, this variant remains a present threat, bolstered by the security vacuum but also grievances born of displacement and marginalization—especially after the takeover of Benghazi by Haftar. But in terms of the most far-reaching effect on society and politics, it is the so-called quietist current of Madkhali Salafism that is playing the most important role.

In its threat to a stable, inclusive, and peaceful civic state, the growth of Madkhalism is most alarming not because of its illiberalism or its superficial

ideological similarity to Salafi jihadists. To be sure, the Madkhalis and ISIS/AQ share some tenets. But there is little to no evidence of Madkhalis crossing over to become members of these terrorist groups—if anything, Madkhalis have proven to be their strongest opponents, both doctrinally and militarily. What makes Madkhalism problematic in Libya is its coercive aspect: the use of force by Madkhali armed groups against religious, ideological, and political opponents, sometimes legitimated by the narrative of policing and countering terrorism. This, in turn, is ultimately a symptom of the pathologies that have bedeviled Libya since the 2011 revolution—chiefly, the lack of a central state and functioning institutions and, increasingly, the struggle for access to oil wealth.

Similarly, foreign interference plays a role: since 2011, rival regional actors have backed armed factions constituted along Islamist lines, whether Brotherhood-affiliated militias or those from the former LIFG, and this has undoubtedly shaped the religious landscape. Support for Madkhalis is less overt and probably more informal, through travel, education, and funding from Saudi Arabia. Even so, it follows a pattern of Gulf—particularly Emirati and Saudi—backing for politically quietist religious actors as means to counter political Islamists like the Brotherhood and jihadists.

The alignment of some Madkhalis with General Haftar's model of authoritarianism further underscores the utility of this current of Salafism to his Arab backers. And yet the relationship is more complex and contested than many realize, with Madkhali armed actors increasingly challenging the notion of a "patron-client" relationship. In the West, foreign actions play a role as well: foreign diplomats, including the UN, and foreign businesses tacitly backed or tolerated Madkhali armed groups because they supported the fragile Government of National Accord and because they acted as local proxies on challenges of interest to Western powers like counterterrorism.

While the Madkhalis' use of arms and funding no doubt accounts for the spread of the movement, there are also deeper sociological and psychological drivers at work. In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty of post-Gaddafi Libya, the intellectual and spiritual security offered by Madkhalism's doctrinal rigidity seems indisputable, as does its professed aim of overcoming the divides that have fragmented the country. Some of this appeal is likely the result of investments and support made by Gaddafi during the last years of his rule. But newer recruits are probably drawn by the mix of factors described in the introduction to this book: social mobilization, protest against old norms of social and political hierarchy, the promise of personal sovereignty (embodied in the Salafis' self-label as the "saved sect"), and belonging to a self-contained community with proscribed norms of dress

and behavior. Such an allure suggests that the growth of Salafism in Libya, including Madkhalism, is less a “foreign,” “Saudi-directed” displacement of a so-called authentic Islam embodied by Sufism and Malikism than an organic, sometimes violent negotiation within Libya’s religious field—reflective, no doubt of domestic chaos and some external factors—but organic nonetheless.

80. Kevin Casey, “A Crumbling Salafi Strategy,” *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 21, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2013/08/21/crumbling-salafi-strategy/gjkq>.
81. Geisser, “Ennahdha et les salafistes.”
82. Kamal Ben Younes, *Islamists and Secularists in Tunisia: From Prisons and Repression to the Challenge of Governing the Country* (Tunis: Berg Editions, 2012), p. 52.
83. Geisser, “Ennahdha et les salafistes.”
84. Frida Dahmani, “Tunisie: Chourou, l’imprécateur,” *Jeune Afrique*, September 19, 2013, www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2748p049.xml1/tunisie-anc-sadok-chourouennahdhatunisie-chourou-l-imprecateur.html.
85. “Tunisie: Réactions des groupes parlementaires aux interventions de Chourou et Badi sur le projet de constitution,” *Babnet Tunisie*, January 18, 2014, www.babnet.net/cadredetail-78316.asp
86. See Isabelle Mandraud, “Ali Larayedh: ‘Je veux redonner confiance aux Tunisiens,’” *Le Monde*, March 26, 2013.
87. Volpi, “Shaping Contention.”
88. See Stefano M. Torelli, “Tunisia’s Elusive Jihadist Network,” *Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor* 11, no. 12 (June 2013): pp. 4–6; Stefano M. Torelli, “Meeting the Jihadi Challenge in Tunisia: The Military and Political Response,” *Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor* 11, no. 17 (September 2013): pp. 5–7.
89. Olfa Lamoum, “Marginalisation, Insecurity and Uncertainty on the Tunisian-Libyan Border: Ben Guerdane and Dhehiba from the Perspective of Their Inhabitants,” *International Alert*, December 2016, http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/TunisiaLibya_MarginalisationInsecurityUncertaintyBorder_EN_2016.pdf.
90. International Crisis Group, “Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy,” *Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing* no. 50, June 22, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/jihadist-violence-tunisia-urgent-need-national-strategy>.
91. BBC, “Tunisia Attacks: Militants Jailed over 2015 Terror,” February 9, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-47183027>.
92. Michaël Béchir Ayari, “Seven Ways to Steady a Tunisia under New Attack,” *Crisis Group* blog, March 9, 2016.
93. Ordinary citizens welcomed this “return” of the state in areas where the police had basically withdrawn. After the initial enthusiasms for the end of the repressive tactics of the police, citizens began to ask for the police to come back as a degree of policing was a necessity.
94. Cavatorta, “Salafism, Liberalism.”
95. Volpi, “Shaping Contention.”

CHAPTER 6

1. The term “Madkhali” is itself highly contentious and reflective of an intense battle for public religious space, formal Islamic institutions, and mosques between Salafists and more politically active Islamist currents that defy easy categorization. According to several interlocutors, it was in the early stages of these splits, in 2013, that activist Islamist currents—some aligned with Brotherhood and jihadist factions—started deploying the term “Madkhali” in their media outlets to denigrate their Salafist opponents as foreign proxies. Thus, the use of the term is somewhat constructed and anachronistic; scholars must be careful about projecting back into time divisions among Salafis that were not present until later in the postrevolutionary period. With these caveats in mind, the term is still a useful device to encompass diverse adherents of this particular strain of Salafism, who do in fact regard Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali as their principal living clerical referent—though

- the relationship is not as slavish or one-way as their opponents maintain, and they also venerate other Salafi clerics, many of them deceased.
2. Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism”; Meijer, “Politicizing *al-jarh wa-l-ta’dil*,” pp. 380–381.
 3. Existing works and media reporting on the Madkhalis include Wehrey, “Quiet No More?”; Ahmad Salah Ali, “Libya’s Warring Parties Play a Dangerous Game Working with Madkhali Salafists,” *Atlantic Council*, November 3, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/libya-s-warring-parties-play-a-dangerous-game-working-with-madkhali-salafists>; Anas El Gomati, “Libya’s Islamists and the 17 February Revolution: A Battle for Revolutionary Theology,” in *Routledge Handbook on the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization*, edited by Larbi Sadiki (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 120–121; Taylor Luck, “Libya Crisis as Opportunity: Who Are the Madkhalis,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2018/0117/Libya-crisis-as-opportunity-Who-are-the-Madkhalis>; Andrew McGregor, “Radical Loyalty and the Libyan Crisis: A Profile of Salafist Shaykh Rabi’ bin Hadi al-Madkhali,” Aberfoyle International Security, January 19, 2017, <http://www.aberfoylesecurity.com/?p=3840>; Celian Mace, “En plein chaos libyen, les salafistes gagnent du terrain,” *Liberation*, April 3, 2018, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2018/04/03/en-plein-chaos-libyen-les-salafistes-gagnent-du-terrain_1640801.
 4. Author interview with Madkhali Salafis, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 5. “The World Fact Book,” Central Intelligence Agency, October 1, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>.
 6. Igor Cherstich, “When Tribesmen Do Not Act Tribal: Libyan Tribalism as Ideology (Not as Schizophrenia),” *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 4 (Winter 2014): pp. 405–421; Lisa Anderson, “Tribe and State: Libyan Anomalies,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, edited by Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), pp. 288–302.
 7. Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 27–29; Lisa Anderson, “‘They Defeated Us All’: International Interests, Local Politics, and Contested Sovereignty in Libya,” *Middle East Journal* 71, no. 2 (Spring 2017): pp. 232–233.
 8. E. Evans Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949); Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 73–102; Faraj Najem, *Tribe, Islam and State in Libya: Analytical Study of the Roots of Libyan Tribal Society and Evolution Up to the Qarmanli Reign (1781–1835)* (Benghazi: Center for Africa Research, 2017), pp. 130–139.
 9. Matteo Capasso and Karim Mezran, “The Idea of the Islamic State in Libyan Politics since Independence,” *Storia del pensiero politico* 3 (September–December 2014): pp. 423–438, doi: 10.4479/78764.
 10. Eileen Ryan, “Italy and the Sanusiyya: Negotiating Authority in Colonial Libya, 1911–1931” (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2012), <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8542VP1>; also: George Joffe, “Islamic Opposition in Libya,” *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April 1988): p. 618.
 11. Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya: Continuity and Change* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 38.
 12. Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, p. 12. Also: Joffe, “Islamic Opposition in Libya,” p. 619.
 13. Igor Chertisch, “Religious Violence in Libya: Who Is to Blame,” *Huffington Post* (blog), December 5, 2012, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/igor-cherstich/religious-violence-in-lib_b_2245265.html.
 14. Alison Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 71–72.

15. Joffe, "Islamic Opposition in Libya," p. 615.
16. Capasso and Mezran, "Idea of the Islamic State," p. 432.
17. Capasso and Mezran, "Idea of the Islamic State," p. 432; Joffe, "Islamic Opposition in Libya," p. 624.
18. The most notable of these was the popular Tripoli imam Sheikh Muhammad Abdalsalam al-Bishti, who was kidnapped by Revolutionary Committee members and made to confess on television about support from Saudi Arabia. See Pargeter, *Libya*, pp. 116–117. Another popular figure whom Qadhafi detained was the grand mufti, Al-Tahir al-Zawi, who was put under house arrest in 1978.
19. Inspired by the activism of the much larger and more entrenched movement in Egypt and bolstered by an overseas network, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood had tried unsuccessfully to organize itself on university campuses. By the end of the 1980s, scores of its members languished in the notorious Abu Slim prison in Tripoli.
20. Joffe, "Islamic Opposition in Libya," pp. 626–629.
21. Alison Pargeter, "Qadhafi and Political Islam," in *Libya since 1969: Qadhafi's Revolution Revisited*, edited by Dirk Vandewalle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 94.
22. Author interview with a former veteran of the Afghan jihad, Tripoli, Libya, May 19, 2017.
23. This is evident in the case of one of these veterans, Abdulhakim Bilhaj, who grew up in the eastern Tripoli suburb of Suq al-Jumaa (Friday Market) where many of these dispossessed families had gone. Author interview with Abdulhakim Bilhaj, Istanbul, Turkey, November 15, 2016. Also: Omar Ashour, "Post-jihadism: Libya and the Global Transformations of Armed Islamist Movements," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 3 (2011): p. 382; Yehudit Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism: Unprecedented Conflict," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2002): p. 7. The actual existence of the LIFG was not revealed until the autumn 1995, during major clashes in Benghazi and other eastern cities.
24. Author interview with longtime Dirna resident and historian, Tunis, Tunisia, November 19, 2016.
25. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," p. 387.
26. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn, eds., *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 212.
27. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," p. 383.
28. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," p. 383.
29. Luis Martiniz, *The Libyan Paradox* (London: Hurst, 2007), pp. 43–80.
30. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," pp. 384–385.
31. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," p. 385.
32. Author interviews with Salafi interlocutors, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
33. Ashour, "Post-jihadism," pp. 285–286; author interview with a Salafi figure and militia leader, Tripoli, May 15, 2017.
34. Author interview with a Salafi adherent in Tripoli, November 2017.
35. On the role of the Islamic University of Medina and Madkhalism, see Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 106.
36. Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith Migration*, p. 106. The Islamic Emirate of Kunar was a brief statelet set up in 1990 by an Afghan Salafi named Jamil al-Rahman in the northeastern province of Kunar. Backed by the Saudi government under King Fahd, it instituted strict Salafi social norms but also held elections, which generated considerable debate. Its dissolution in 1991 at the hands of a rival Afghan faction and al-Rahman's assassination generated a significant outpouring of mourning and commentary across the Salafi spectrum, from jihadists like Osama bin Laden to quietists like Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali. Many Salafis

- saw it as the first attempt at an ideal Islamic state. See Kevin Bell, “The First Islamic State: A Look Back at the Islamic Emirate of Kunar,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2016), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-first-islamic-state-a-look-back-at-the-islamic-emirate-of-kunar/>.
37. For background on al-Wadi'i, see Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen*; Laurent Bonnefoy, “How Salafism Came to Yemen: An Unknown Legacy of Juhayman al-'Utaybi 30 Years On,” Middle East Institute, October 1, 2009, <http://www.mei.edu/content/how-salafism-came-yemen-unknown-legacy-juhayman-al-utaybi-30-years>.
 38. Originally of Egyptian origin (his original name is Mustafa bin Isma'il al-Sulaymani), al-Ma'ribi fled Egypt during the 1980s and, after studying with al-Wadi'i, established a seminary in the near the town of Ma'rib. See Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen*, p. 71.
 39. For background, see Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen*, pp. 71–76. Doctrinaire Madkhali refer to him as a Muslim Brotherhood “implant” or as Abu Al-Hassan al-Ma'ribi “al-Ikhwani” (the Brother) or “al-Masri” (the Egyptian). His critics also accused him of sympathy for Sayyid Qutb and al-Qaeda.
 40. Salafis labeled the schism the “Fitna Abu al-Hassan” (The Discord of Abu al-Hassan). On Madkhali's intervention, see Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen*, p. 72.
 41. Author interview with Madkhali Salafists, Tripoli, May and November 2017. According to one Libyan Salafi, “Anyone who didn't declare Abu al-Hasan al-Ma'ribi's ideas as *bida'* (innovation) we called him a “Ma'ribi.” The Ma'ribis, this source added, “were always a little closer to the *harakis* or the *du'at*” (meaning the Saudi Sahwa clerics like Salman al-Awda and Safar al-Hawali).
 42. The split between supporters of Ma'ribi and al-Wadi'i/Madkhali reverberated also in Algeria and even among Libya Salafis residing in Europe, specifically the large expatriate community in Manchester, England. Author interview with Libyan Salafi interlocutors and a Libyan conflict analyst, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019. The Libyan Salafis who sided with Ma'ribi include Shaaban Madud Khalifa Hadiya, also known as Abu Ubayda al-Zway, a notable activist Salafi from the western town of Zawiya, and Ahmed Gumata (also known as Abu Harun), as well as Nader Umrani, Mahmud bin Musa, and Abd al-Gader al-Na'rut. Libyan Yemeni graduates who stayed with Madkhali and Wadi'i include Madji Hafala, Muhammad al-Anqar, and Muhammad Nazal al-Qatrani (Abu Abdallah al-Abyari). Author interview with Salafi figures in Tripoli, Libya, May and November 2017.
 43. Ronen, “Qadhafi and Militant Islamism,” p. 7.
 44. Author interview with Salafi figures and Ministry of Interior officials, Tripoli, Libya, May to November 2018. See also Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, p. 74.
 45. Author interview with Salafi figures, Tripoli, February 2019.
 46. Author interviews with Salafi figures in Benghazi, May 2017 and Tripoli, February 2019. Also, the Algerian newspaper *El-Sharuk* published an article citing a Libyan intelligence dossier that, while it should be treated with care, corroborates this: “The Libyan Intelligence Exposed Secrets and Plots of the Domestic Current in the Region!,” *El-Sharuk*, December 25, 2017; <https://www.echoroukonline.com>.
 47. Author interview with a Salafi adherent, Tripoli, Libya, June 2019.
 48. “Sheikh al-Qarni Visits Libya to Give a Series of Lectures,” MENAS Associates, September 20, 2010; <http://menasassociates.blogspot.com/2010/09/sheikh-al-qarni-visits-libya-to-give.html>.
 49. Gomati, “Libya's Islamists,” p. 140.
 50. Author interview with Salafi interlocutor, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 51. Author interviews with Salafi interlocutors in Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 52. Author interview with a Salafi figure close to Abyari, Tripoli, Libya, May 11, 2017. Some sources allege that Saadi was closer to the “Ma'ribis” before meeting Nazal. Nazal later became Saadi's personal secretary in 2005.

53. Author interview with a former member of the Misrata *awqaf*, Misrata, Libya, June 10, 2019. Other interlocutors have corroborated this “outsider” dimension of Salafism in Misrata by noting that many of the key Salafi figures in Misrata trace their lineage to lower-status families and tribes that were not perceived as “original,” or at least not as historically rooted in the city’s social fabric.
54. Author interviews in Tripoli, February and June 2019.
55. Born in the Tripoli neighborhood of Ghut al-Shaal but tracing his roots to the town of Yefren in the western Nafusa mountains, Hafala studied in Saudi Arabia and then in Yemen with Muqbil al-Wadi’i and briefly sided with Abu Hassan al-Ma’ribi before returning to the more quietist Madkhali current. During the 2011 revolution, he issued a statement urging active Salafi support for Qadhafi as the *wali al-amr*—a defense that at least one Salafi observer alleges was partly coerced. After the revolution, he became a powerful figure among various Madkhali armed groups in Tripolitania, reportedly operating a school, mosque and guesthouse on Tripoli’s airport road. Author interviews with Salafi interlocutors, Tripoli, Libya, May 2017 and February 2019. Another key Amazigh Madkhali figure is Muhammad Abu Sala from Nalut. See Collombier, “Sirte’s Tribes,” pp. 213–214.
56. Author interview with a Salafi preacher, Laythi, Benghazi, Libya, November 25, 2017.
57. Author interview with a Salafi cleric, Tripoli, Libya, February 25, 2019.
58. Anon., “Salafism and Madkhalism in Libya . . . and Revolting against the Legitimate Ruler” (in Arabic) *Al-Araby al-Jadeed* (UK), September 14, 2014, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk>.
59. Emad Mekay, “Too Late, Qaddafi Seeks the Aid of Muslim Clerics,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/world/africa/03iht-M03-FATWA.html>.
60. Author interviews with Salafi interlocutors in Tripoli, Libya, February 2019. A statement attributed to him at the time has been taken off line. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB3XESLaZz0>.
61. See his audiotaped statement here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sriMveeY9vA>.
62. Author interview with a Salafi figure, Benghazi, Libya, May 15, 2017.
63. Author interview with Abdelraouf Kara, Tripoli, Libya, November 2013.
64. Author interview with Muslim Brotherhood activists, Tripoli and Misrata, Libya, May 2017.
65. Author interview with a Salafi figure, Tripoli, Libya, February 24, 2019.
66. Gomati, “Libya’s Islamists,” p. 123.
67. Mary Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place: Libya’s Islamists during and after the Revolution,” in Cole and McQuinn, *Libyan Revolution*, p. 200.
68. Yet in the 2014 elections for its follow-on, the House of Representatives, in which the Muslim Brotherhood participation was significantly weakened, the Madkhalis adopted a supportive role, especially after then-prime minister Ali Zeidan had reportedly gone to Saudi Arabia to ask Rabi himself for a statement endorsing the voting. Anon., “Salafism and Madkhalism in Libya.”
69. Author interview with activists and voters in Tripoli and Benghazi, June–July 2012. See also Omar Ashour, “Libya’s Defeated Islamists,” *al-Jazeera*, July 18, 2012, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/07/20127187155487377.html>.
70. “General National Congress Elections in Libya: Final Report,” Carter Center, July 7, 2012, https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/libya-070712-final-rpt.pdf
71. Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place,” p. 203.
72. Human Rights Watch, “Libya: Reject ‘Political Isolation Law,’” May 4, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/04/libya-reject-political-isolation-law>. Also: Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, pp. 147–150.

73. Author interview with Abd al-Hakim Bilhaj, Istanbul, Turkey, November 15, 2016.
 74. Author interview with a former UN official, location withheld, September 10, 2016.
 75. A gathering of militias called the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Rooms (LROR) had been crucial in the passage of the law. The LROR is led by an activist Salafist named Shaaban Madud Khalifa Hadiya (also known as Abu Ubayda al-Zway) from the western revolutionary town of Zawiya. Author interview with a Salafist figure in Tripoli, Libya, May 5, 2017. Hadiya earned a master's degree in Arabic and a doctorate in sharia from the University of Alexandria before relocating to Yemen in 1993 for ten years where he studied with Muqbil al-Wadi'i and became a teacher at al-Wadi'i's institute in Dammaj, Yemen, before aligning with Ma'ribi. He is thought to have returned to Libya after the 2011 revolution, when he quickly rose to power among the Zawiya-based rebels. In 2014, in a public speech, Shaaban announced his support for the Libya Dawn coalition and called on Khalifa Haftar to act in support of Libyans, according to *Al-Wasat*. In 2014, there was a prominent incident involving Hadiya when he was arrested in Egypt for alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood, and then six Egyptians were kidnapped in Libya as a retaliation for his arrest. Hadiya, was released in a coordinated swap between the countries. See Salem Al-Abadi, "Shaaban to 'Al-Wasat': Haftar is Deceptive and Dignity is Retreating," *Al-Wasat*, December 13, 2014, <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/48331>; and also Nicholas A. Heras, "Sketches of Shaykh Sha'ban Madoud Khalifa Hadia and Uthman Mliqta, Rival Libyan Militia Commanders," *Militant Leadership Monitor* 5, no. 5 (May 2014). Also: "Libyan Militia Commander Released in Swap for Abducted Egyptians," *The Guardian*, January 27, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/27/abducted-egyptian-diplomats-freed-libya-cairo>.
 76. For background on Libya's militias and armed groups, see Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, pp. 85–103.
 77. Frederic Wehrey, "Libya's Policing Sector: Dilemmas of Hybridity and Security Pluralism," Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS), *The Politics of Post Conflict Reconstruction*, July 2018, <https://pomeps.org/2018/09/11/libyas-policing-sector-the-dilemmas-of-hybridity-and-security-pluralism/>.
 78. Moncef Ouannès, *Militaires, élites et modernisation dans la Libye Contemporaine* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2009). For a discussion of Libya's fractured security sector and militia penetration, see Frederic Wehrey, "Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 24, 2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/ending-libya-s-civil-war-reconciling-politics-rebuilding-security-pub-56741>.
 79. Author interview with a cleric close to Ansar al-Sharia, Benghazi, November 10, 2013.
 80. A longtime Benghazi resident with a murky jihadist past, al-Zahawi had been imprisoned in Abu Slim in the late 1990s after being expelled from Saudi Arabia (he was reportedly studying there illegally, under his brother's passport) and handed over to Gaddafi's intelligence services. Fighting on the front lines in the 2011 revolution under an umbrella of Islamist-leaning armed groups, he broke ranks sometime in April 2011 over the recognition of Libya's transitional council and Western intervention, forming the nucleus of Ansar al-Sharia. For a good discussion of the militia and its rise and fall, see Aaron Y. Zelin, "The Rise and Decline of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, Hudson Institute, April 6, 2015, <https://www.hudson.org/research/11197-the-rise-and-decline-of-ansar-al-sharia-in-libya>.
81. Maqdisi had once mentored the infamous Jordanian-born Iraqi terrorist and progenitor of the Islamic State Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. But after his former protégé's murderous campaign in Iraq had alienated potential supporters, he cautioned against extreme displays of violence directed at fellow Muslims. And with the 2011 Arab uprisings, he urged his followers not to fight but to take advantage of changing circumstances. Through his

- online legal forum Minbar al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Platform for Monotheism and Jihad), Maqdisi and his allied clerics issued new directives concerning jihad. See Zelin, “Maqdisi’s Disciples.”
82. Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, p. 108.
 83. Ansar al-Sharia sent convoys of vehicles filled with young fighters from Benghazi, Derna, and other eastern towns to support jihadists fighting French troops in northern Mali. It also trained fighters loyal to the seasoned Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who would lead an attack on the Tigantourine gas facility in Amenas, Algeria, that killed thirty-seven foreigners.
 84. Wehrey, “When the Islamic State Came to Libya.”
 85. Wehrey, “Quiet No More.”
 86. Wehrey, “Quiet No More.” Kara’s own outlook adheres more to scripturalist, *da’wa* Salafism than Madkhalism *per se*—while critics often maintain that he is driven by rank opportunism. In an interview, with the author he said he subscribed to such quietist tenets such as adherence to the *wali al-amr*. But he did not count Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali as one of his clerical referents, listing instead the Saudi clerics bin Uthaymin, al-Albani, bin Baz, as well the Yemeni cleric al-Wadi’i. He also exhibited some flexibility for democracy, saying, “I am opposed to it personally, but if the majority of Libyans want it, then I can’t oppose it.” Author interview with Abdelraouf Kara, Tripoli, Libya, May 15, 2013.
 87. Author interview with Special Deterrence Force personnel, Tripoli, Libya, February 15, 2016.
 88. The author is grateful to Libya scholar Jalel Harchaoui for this insight. Author’s email exchange with Jalel Harchaoui, March 2019.
 89. Author interview with Abdelraouf Kara, Tripoli, Libya, February 15, 2016. The first militia that Kara established was called the Nawasi Brigade, named for a horse-riding club in Suq al-Jumaa, during the revolution. Later, as Kara became commander of a Tripoli-wide umbrella militia formation under the Ministry of Interior called the Supreme Security Committee “Support Branches,” the Nawasi Brigade affiliated itself under Kara. The relationship between the Nawasi (currently under the leadership of the Qaddur family from Suq al-Jumaa) and Kara’s Deterrence Force has always been fluid and permeable.
 90. Chertisch, “Religious Violence in Libya.”
 91. Author interview with Abdelraouf Kara, Tripoli, Libya, May 12, 2013.
 92. For a detailed description of the attacks, see Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, pp. 125–143.
 93. Human Rights Watch, “Libya: Wave of Political Assassinations,” August 8, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/08/libya-wave-political-assassinations>.
 94. Frederic Wehrey, “The Battle for Benghazi,” *The Atlantic*, February 28, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/02/the-battle-for-benghazi/284102/>.
 95. Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, pp. 165–167.
 96. Missy Ryan, “A Former CIA Asset Has Become a U.S. Headache in Libya,” *Washington Post*, August 17, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/a-former-cia-asset-has-become-a-us-headache-in-libya/2016/08/17/a766e392-54c6-11e6-bbf5-957ad17b4385_story.html?utm_term=.b139415091b2.
 97. For a useful overview, see Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, “Dignity and Dawn: Libya’s Escalating Civil War,” ICCT Research Paper, February 2015, <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Gartenstein-Ross-Barr-Dignity-and-Dawn-Libyas-Escalating-Civil-War-February2015.pdf>.
 98. Wehrey, “Ending Libya’s Civil War.”
 99. United Nations Security Council, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011), June 11, 2017, pp. 24–35.
 100. Wehrey, “Ending Libya’s Civil War.”
 101. Author interview with a member of the pro-Hiftar Tawhid Battalion, later remained the 210 Infantry Battalion, Benghazi, Libya, September 2015. One of the clearest and earliest

- endorsements from Saudi Arabia to support the LNA came from the grand mufti, Abdul-Aziz ibn Abdullah Al al-Sheikh. For his audiorecording in May 2014, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGj1YscOEUY>.
102. Author interview with a former student of Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali, Sabratha, Libya, February 2019.
 103. For a recording of the statement, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOyYSJnLuuA>.
 104. Madkhali recording in a YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTWezgeaiEk>; see also “Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali calls for a Salafist Revolt Against the ‘Brotherhood’ in Libya” (in Arabic) *Al-Arabi* 21, July 9, 2016, <https://arabi21.com>.
 105. Author interview with a Salafi cleric from the Salafi 210 Infantry Battalion who participated in the delegation, Benghazi, Libya, November 2017.
 106. Author interview with a Salafi cleric Benghazi, Libya, May 19, 2017.
 107. Author interview with a Madkhali Salafi cleric, Benghazi, Libya, May 5, 2017.
 108. For videos of his sermons, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0FzWL1g8n8>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Lb2L2wcMvc>.
 109. Author interviews and observations with LNA and support-force personnel in Benghazi, Libya, September 2015 and May 2017.
 110. Author interviews with LNA commanders and observers in Benghazi, Libya, May 2017.
 111. Author interviews with activists and civil society, Benghazi, Libya, May 2017.
 112. Valerie Stocker, “How Armed Groups Are Plundering Libya’s Banks,” *Middle East Eye*, April 10, 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-bloodshed-how-spoils-war-are-divided-tripoli-451507400>; Wolfram Lacher, “Tripoli’s Militia Cartel,” *SWP Comment*, April 20, 2018; <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/libya-tripolis-militia-cartel/>.
 113. For posts about its seizures of drugs, see <https://www.facebook.com/1021745154586317/videos/1851344274959730/>; for other posts about captured drugs: <https://www.facebook.com/1021745154586317/photos/a.1027717337322432.1073741829.1021745154586317/1821188237975334/?type=3>; https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1820485254712299&id=1021745154586317.
 114. Author interview with Special Deterrence Force personnel, Tripoli, Libya, February 2016.
 115. Bel Trew, “Manchester Bomber Salman Abedi’s Father and Brother Arrested by Rada, a Hardline Islamist Group,” *The Times*, May 25, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/salman-abedis-father-and-a-brother-arrested-by-rada-a-hardline-islamist-group-f7ffdtbpb>.
 116. Author’s observation inside the Deterrence Force prison’s rehabilitation program, Tripoli, Libya, February 2016. According to the United Nations, torture is rampant, particularly against Islamic State suspects. Author telephone interview with a UN officer based in Tunis, Tunisia, September 2017.
 117. Author interview with an Islamic State detainee, Tripoli, Libya, February 2016.
 118. “Libya: Armed Group Shuts Down Comic Book Convention,” British Broadcasting Corporation, November 4, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-41871697>. For the Special Deterrence Force’s statement, see https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1792170270877131&id=1021745154586317.
 119. Author interviews with United Nations and European Union officials, Tunis, Tunisia, November 2017.
 120. Author interviews with members of the 604th Brigade, Sirte, Libya, November 2017 and with Salafi militias in Tripoli, May and November 2017.
 121. Author interviews with members of the 604th Brigade, Sirte, Libya, June and July 2016. See also Wehrey, “Quiet No More.”

122. Author interviews with Misratan militia members fighting in Bunyan al-Marsusi, Sirte, Libya, June and July 2016.
123. The 604th Battalion maintains an active Facebook page that often posts security updates as well as Salafi material, largely derived from proregime quietist Saudi clerics. On February 21, 2018, for example, the page posted a video of a recitation by Sheikh Salah Fawzan (presumably the prominent Salafi Saudi cleric who has been a member of various high religious bodies in Saudi Arabia). In July 2017, the page posted an Islamic verse or recitation of sorts with a reference to Sheikh Abdul Aziz ibn Abdullah Al al-Sheikh, the current grand mufti of Saudi Arabia. See https://www.facebook.com/pg/604.infantry.battalion/posts/?ref=page_internal; <https://www.facebook.com/604.infantry.battalion/videos/574894589552066/>; <https://www.facebook.com/604.infantry.battalion/photos/a.256349308073264.1073741828.255077974867064/475268006181392/?type=3&theater>.
124. Badi and Wehrey, “Place of Distinctive Despair.”
125. “The Madkhali Trend in Libya Is a Military Power in the Hand of Haftar” (in Arabic), *Al-Araby*, February 7, 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk>.
126. Author interview with the commander of the 604h Brigade, Sirte, Libya, December 2017.
127. Author interview with Salafist prison wardens and civil society activists, Sabha, Libya, February 2016. See also Frederic Wehrey, “Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 30, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/30/insecurity-and-governance-challenges-in-southern-libya-pub-68451>.
128. Sami Zaptia, “Most Libyan Militias Involved in Illegal Migration Activities Nominally Affiliated to Official State Security Institutions: UN Libya Experts Panel Report,” *Libya Herald*, March 11, 2018.
129. Abdullah Ben Ibrahim, “Dignity Operation Armed Group Attacks Shrine of Libya’s Former King Idris Senussi’s Father,” *Libya Observer*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/crimes/dignity-operation-armed-group-attacks-shrine-libya%E2%80%99s-former-king-idris-senussi%E2%80%99s-father>.
130. Jalel Harchaoui, “Libya’s Looming Contest for the Central Bank,” *War on the Rocks*, April 1, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/libyas-looming-contest-for-the-central-bank/>.
131. Author’s interviews with security officials in Tripoli, November 2017 and also with local brigade leaders in Sabratha, Libya, February 2019. See also Frederic Wehrey, “A Minister, a General, and the Militias: Libya’s Shifting Balance of Power,” *New York Review of Books*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/03/19/a-minister-a-general-militias-libyas-shifting-balance-of-power/>.
132. According to interlocutors, Madkhali adherents were present in the city before and during the 2011 revolution, where many, perhaps because of their ideological opposition to bearing arms, performed functions like guarding a key prison and operating a cemetery. The prison role continues to this day. More recently, Madkhalis have grown assertive through the formation of militias and “combating crime committees” that have suppressed more activist and jihadist currents. They have tried to influence the municipal council via the Madkhalist brother of the former mayor. They have also sought, unsuccessfully, to control the city’s *awqaf* (endowments) office. Key Madkhali figures in the city include Anwar Faraj al-Swessi, the most influential figure, Abu Ubayda al-Sh’hubi, also known as Abu Ubayda al-Misrati, who studied under Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi’i in Yemen, and Abd al-Rahma al-Kote, the leader of the Mirdas Battalion militia that fought the Islamic State in Sirte and who had pushed for reconciliation with Haftar’s camp prior to Haftar’s April 4th attack on the capital. Author email exchanges with Misratan activists and foreign observers, February–March 2019.

133. See, for example, a statement on the official Kaibat al-Wadi bi-Sabratha Facebook page asking all its fighters to join the battle on behalf of Khalifa Haftar. <https://www.facebook.com/katibt.alwady/posts/2305357159675707>.
134. Author interview with a Makhali Salafi figure in Tripoli, Libya, June 14, 2019.
135. Author interview with Zawiyani militia leader Mahmud bin Rajab, Tripoli, Libya, June 15, 2019.
136. On the front lines near a Yarmouk military camp, the author observed a subunit under Deterrence Force command that was made up entirely of ethnic Tuareg from the southern Libyan town of Ubari. Author's observation on the front lines, Tripoli, Libya, June 7–22, 2019.
137. Arianna Poletti, "Marshal Haftar's Alliance with Madkhali Salafists Is Very Dangerous" [in French], *Jeune Afrique*, April 9, 2019.
138. Author interview with a Libyan source close to Mahmud Hamza, Tripoli, Libya, June 20, 2019. According to this source, Hamza sent a delegation to Saudi Arabia to ask permission to join the battle on behalf of the GNA. Drawn from the top ten graduates of a Deterrence Force parachute course, the delegation performed umrah in Medina and met with a cleric affiliated with Rabi bin Hadi al-Madkhali. The cleric told them that the legitimate *wali al-amr* was the Libyan parliament, meaning the House of Representatives, which was notionally aligned to Haftar. According to this source, Hamza questioned this ruling, saying, "Does Saudi Arabia (as an outsider) have a good understanding of Libya?" Then, the prime minister of the GNA, Fayezi Seraj, visited Saudi Arabia and met with King Salman on June 5. Two days later, the cleric issued a new ruling that the GNA is the *wali al-amr*, but that the "war has a lot of *shubhuhat* (doubts and misunderstandings)." This was likely intended as a heavy caveat against a full-throated defense of the GNA. The cleric went on to authorize the Salafis in Libya to take up arms for the sake of "assisting the maltreated."
139. For example, the influential Misratan Madkhali leader Anwar Faraj al-Swessi rebuked Haftar's attack on the capital as a "betrayal" and refuted the media reporting that he had sided with the assault. See https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=591768368005885&id=100015181814853.
140. Author interview with Salafi interlocutor in Tripoli, Libya, June 14, 2019. Durman in particular was reportedly fearful of causing further *fitna* (strife) within the already divided town of Zintan.
141. See, for example, <https://www.facebook.com/100012474798599/videos/617500245342463/>.
142. For example, an Egyptian cleric named Khalid bin Uthman al-Masri rebuked the aforementioned Tariq Durman for fighting Haftar's LNA on the side of a prominent Zintani commander, the Usama al-Juwayli. Al-Masri also lambasted Saudi scholars, such as al-Fawzan, for not denouncing Durman. His audio recording is available at <https://www.facebook.com/Mnbsalfjerba/videos/2158668074247528/>.
143. According to Libyan sources, the Madkhalis are justifying their support for the GNA and its prime minister as the *wali al-amr* because they were able to provide salaries and facilitate the hajj pilgrimage. Author interviews with Madkhali Salafi interlocutors, Tripoli, Libya, June 2019.
144. On how local ties shaped the decision about whether or not to fight, see Wolfram Lacher, "Think Libya's warring factions are only in it for the money? Think again," *Washington Post Monkey Cage Blog*, April 19, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/04/10/think-libyas-warring-factions-are-only-it-money-think-again/?utm_term=.b5f57b9aedc4.
145. In Misrata, for example, one former member of the city's *awqaf* department recalls a struggle by Salafis to control the local administration of *awqaf* because it owned

- substantial plots of land. Salafis also tried to take over mosques by having the sitting imam dismissed through an administrative sanction. According to one official, Salafis would attend a mosque and submit their names on a petition to the local *awqaf* department that the imam had “made mistakes” in his interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith. In accordance with procedure, the *awqaf* would send a committee to investigate, which included a surprise visit to a sermon and a review of the names on the petition. According to this interlocutor it became clear that the names on the petition were Salafis from outside the mosque, who had attended with the express purpose of removing the imam. Author interview with a former member of the Misrata *awqaf*, Misrata, Libya, June 2019.
146. See Wolfram Lacher, “Faultlines of the Revolution: Political Actors, Camps and Conflicts in the New Libya,” research paper, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, May 2013, pp. 15–16, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2013_RP04_lac.pdf.
 147. Author interviews with Salafi figures in Tripoli, Libya, May 2017 and February 2019.
 148. In one well-known case, Madkhali ejected the imam of the Bir Mosque in the Siraj neighborhood who had been appointed by the Ghariani-aligned faction. Author interviews with Salafi figures, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 149. Author interviews with Salafis in Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 150. Author interview with Salafis in Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
 151. See, for example, the attack by the Central Security Force, a powerful, GNA-aligned militia based in Tripoli’s Abu Slim neighborhood, on the remnants of the National Salvation Government in the Rixos hotel in March 2017. Ahmed Elumami, “Tripoli Armed Factions Take Over Rival’s Compound in Heavy Fighting,” Reuters, March 15, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-tripoli/tripoli-armed-factions-take-over-rivals-compound-in-heavy-fighting-idUSKBN16M1NY>.
 152. Many went to Turkey, though some fled to the eastern Tripoli quarter of Tajura, Ghariani’s home neighborhood, or to Misrata.
 153. Moutaz Ali, “Man Confesses to Omrani Murder, Links to Rada Alleged,” *Libya Herald*, November 21, 2016, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/11/21/man-confesses-to-omrani-murder-links-to-rada-alleged/>.
 154. Specifically, a video published on the Facebook page of Tripoli’s Criminal Investigation Board shows a man named Haitham al-Zintani, a member of the Crime Fighting Apparatus, confessing his role in shooting and burying Umrani as punishment for his spreading the “false religious views” of a Salafist version of Islam different from that of Madkhali. According to Zintani’s confession, they were directed by the Egyptian Madkhalist Mohammed Saeed Raslan to kill Umrani. Following the murder, Libyan grand mufti Sadeq al-Ghariani “accused Libyan Madkhali of being spies and would-be assassins acting on behalf of unnamed Arab Gulf countries.” See “Grand Mufti Accuses Madkhali Followers” of Being Foreign Agents and Planning to Kill Libyan Clerics,” *Libya Herald*, November 23, 2016, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/11/23/grand-mufti-accuses-madkhali-followers-of-being-foreign-agents-and-planning-to-kill-libyan-clerics/>. Also: Abdulkader Assad, “By Egyptian Fatwa and Libyan Execution, Libyan Cleric Nadir Al-Omrani Killed after 45 days of Kidnap [sic],” *Libya Observer*, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/egyptian-fatwa-and-libyan-execution-libyan-cleric-nadir-omrani-killed-after-45-days-kidnap>.
 155. Author interview with a Muslim Brotherhood member and former revolutionary commander, Tripoli, Libya, November 2018.
 156. Author interview with Abdelraouf Kara, Tripoli, Libya, February 2016.
 157. “Grand Mufti Accuses Madkhali Followers. The list included prominent preachers such as Majdi Hafala, Tariq Durman, and Mohammed al-Anqar.

158. Salafi interlocutors in Tripoli noted that the brother of Abbani was close to the Deterrence Force or actively involved with the militia. Author interviews in Tripoli, Libya, June 2019.
159. Author interview with a Madkhali Salafi adherent, Tripoli, Libya, February 2019.
160. Author interview with an Ubaydat tribal notable from Tobruk, Benghazi, Libya, September 2015.
161. Most notable among these is the eastern Madkhali Salafist Ashraf al-Mayyar al-Hasi.
162. Author interviews with a gathering of professors and local activists at the University of Benghazi, Benghazi, Libya, May 2017.
163. The decision was later retracted and replaced with another edict that stated that male and female travelers under forty-five had to obtain permission from Ministry of Interior. Anon., “Nazhuri Bans Women Flying from Labraq without Male Guardian,” *Libya Herald*, February 19, 2012, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/02/19/nazhuri-bans-women-flying-from-labraq-without-male-guardian/>.
164. Author interview with a member of the 210 Infantry Battalion, Benghazi, Libya, May 2017. See also “Organizers of the ‘Earth Hour’ ceremony in Benghazi were referred to the Military Prosecution,” *Al-Wasat*, March 29, 2017, <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/128463>.
165. Author interview with a Salafi cleric and member of the 210 Infantry Battalion, Benghazi, Libya, September 2015 and May 2017.
166. Direct Saudi funding to Madkhali armed groups is difficult to establish conclusively. Similarly, Emirati support to pro-LNA Madkhali armed groups probably falls within the context of broader Emirati support to Hiftar’s forces, though the Emiratis have backed Madkhali Salafist groups in Yemen. According to an Egyptian diplomat, the Emirati tolerance of and even support for Libyan Madkhali armed groups is a point of policy contention between Cairo and Abu Dhabi. Author interview with an Egyptian diplomat, Washington, DC, April 10, 2017.
167. Jamie Prentis, “Radical Saudi Cleric Prevented from Speaking in Tobruk,” *Libya Herald*, February 7, 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/02/07/radical-saudi-cleric-prevented-from-speaking-in-tobruk/>.
168. Most recently, in what is allegedly a phone call between Haftar and Utaybi leaked by the *Libya Observer* on February 19, 2018, Utaybi warns Haftar to “protect himself . . . focus on supporting the real Islam that is followed by our Salafist brothers.” Utaybi also apparently urged Haftar to bring Salafist clerics closer to him to provide him with Sharia advice. Earlier that week, the grand mufti, Sadeq al-Ghariani had publicly accused Saudi Arabia of sending Madkhali followers to support Haftar, saying that Haftar, like Qadhafi, had “blood on his hands.” For an audio of the alleged leaked phone call: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=xyDzobjeMzs; for a *Libya Observer* article about the phone call: <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/saudi-extremist-cleric-phones-warlord-khalifa-haftar-give-him-instructions-how-build-his-army>.
169. “The Religious Case in Libya,” Libyan Organization of Policies and Strategies (LOOPS), February 2017, <http://loopsresearch.org/media/images/photoexmom3cuiq.pdf>.
170. Anon., “The Dismissal of the Interim Government’s Endowment Chief: Sign of a Divorce between Haftar and the Madakhliya” [in Arabic], *Libya Observer*, April 23, 2019, <https://ar.libyaobserver.ly/article/4365>.
171. For an audio recording of the statement, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i60XNSXdqrw>; “Extremists Demolish Libya’s Shrines Using Bulldozers, Explosives,” *France 24*, August 29, 2018, <http://observers.france24.com/en/20120829-extremists-demolish-libya-shrines-using-bulldozers-explosives-libya-mausoleum-zliten-tripoli-video-salafists>.

172. For his audio recording, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LTc_3hpwZw&t=6s. His influence is also felt on the distribution of power on the ground: according an interlocutor, the Tripoli neighborhood of Abu Slim is influenced by Muhammad's supporters, which has prevented followers of the powerful Libyan cleric Majdi Hafala, a Rabi supporter, from entering. Similarly, in eastern Libya, when the Zintani Madkhali cleric and Rabi supporter Tariq Durman went to Benghazi, supporters of Muhammad in the city prevented him from preaching. Author interviews with Salafis in Tripoli, February 2019.
173. The split has grown so severe that one Salafi figure called the post-2018 period the "*Fitna al-Saafiqat*." Author interview with a Madkhali Salafi figure, Tripoli, Libya, June 16, 2019.