

**The De-Radicalization Process of Terrorist Organizations: The  
Libyan Case (The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group – LIFG /  
Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah Al-Muqatilah fi-Libya)**

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## Introduction

One of the most interesting and important phenomena yet to have received appropriate treatment in research literature is the de-radicalization process which several Islamic terrorist organizations have undergone and are still undergoing. That is, abandoning the path of terrorism and the use of violence as a political tool for achieving goals, re-examining the guiding ideology and formulating an alternate moderate ideology, and sometimes even demonstrating willingness to fit into the country's and the society's institutions. In the 1980s and 1990s the Egyptian "Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah" Islamic group was prominent as a murderous terrorist organization wishing to bring down Mubarak's rule by use of violence, but decided to change its way and abandon the path of terrorism. In July 1997 "Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah" declared a cease-fire with the Egyptian government and in 2002 it disarmed itself of its weapons. It has even published several books in which it re-examined its ideological platform and justified its new, non-violent agenda.<sup>1</sup> A re-writing of an ideology after it is re-examined is known as "Muraja'at" (revision).

In the past decade we have been witness to attempts made by Muslim regimes to cope with the phenomenon of radicalization by formulating a policy and action strategy whose objective is to encourage a de-radicalization process. This approach has developed over the past decade and is attempting to provide an answer to all the elements of radicalization and its sources of development. Within this there are various and diverse methods of approach for coping with radicalization, thus far with no proven significant success. In 2009, Omar Ashour<sup>2</sup> published research which seems to be the first extensive examination of its kind dealing with the issue of de-radicalization amongst terrorist organizations in Egypt and Algeria. It proposes a detailed theory regarding the analysis of the de-radicalization process of armed Islamic terrorist movements, the reasons for the

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Dr. Najeh Ibrahim's book "A Fatwa against the Tatars by the Sheikh of Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah". The author criticizes the incorrect use made by contemporary Islamic movements of the fatwa issued by the 13<sup>th</sup> century scholar, Ibn Taymiyyah, against the right of the Mongol rulers to hold the reins of government to justify the use of violence against the authorities. This book received the approval of the "Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah" Shura Council.

<sup>2</sup> An Egyptian researcher and lecturer in Politics at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter.

beginning of such a process, and parameters that may contribute to its success. Ashour contends that the de-radicalization process can be divided into three types:<sup>3</sup>

- a. **Comprehensive de-radicalization.** The success of such a process depends on the success of three levels simultaneously: the ideological level – a re-examination of the ideology and replacing it with another, and de-legitimizing the use of violence. The behavioral level – meaning the intention of forsaking the use of violence as a tool for achieving political goals, but without condemning violence on an ideological level. The organizational level – meaning the dismantling of the armed mechanism within the organization without division or internal violence between its members. “Al-Jama’a Al-Islamiyyah” stands out as a group which has undergone this process on all of these three levels.<sup>4</sup>
- b. **Substantive de-radicalization.** This means the success of the process on two levels: ideological and behavioral, but not on the organizational level. This requires the creation of an internal conflict and a questioning of the process itself amongst group members, eventually leading to a separation and a division amongst its members and to the pushing aside of the “moderate” leadership. An example of an Islamic terrorist organization that underwent such a process is the Egyptian Jihad organization, known for its close ties with Al-Qaeda.
- c. **Pragmatic de-radicalization.** Success on the behavioral and organizational levels, but without the condemnation of the ideology of the use of terrorism. The Algerian Islamic terrorist organization “The Islamic Salvation Army” could be placed in this category.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements*, N.Y: Routledge, 2009, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> For more details on the de-radicalization process the group underwent, see: Ibid, pages 91-102.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed review of the process this group underwent, see: Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, pp. 118-127.

Ashour mentions four necessary parameters that need to be applied simultaneously for the de-radicalization process to be deemed a complete success:

- a. **A charismatic leader** who can influence the members of his militant group. This leader must enjoy great admiration from the members of his group due to a respected military and religious background. According to Ashour, the intervention of a charismatic religious leader is better than that of a military leader, even if he is not a member of the group. However, a religious leader who is a member of the group is preferable as his intervention has more weight and effect on the members of the militant group.
- b. **Intensive oppression by the state** on the militant group members. The implementation of this forces the group's leadership to consider the desirability of the ongoing use of violence due to the price it may have to pay for it, and to re-examine the legitimacy and theology backing it. Ashour emphasizes that being satisfied with this component is not enough as it may lead to further escalation amongst the militant group members, and therefore all four components should be combined.
- c. **Awarding selective incentives by the state** to the members of the armed group, such as release from prison, financial support, allowing involvement in political activity, finding employment and more. If the state decides to go back on its promises to the group members this may antagonize the group members and lead to an entrenchment in their previous position and point of view.
- d. **Social interaction** between the various strata of the armed group members (internal interaction) and social interaction with the "other" (external interaction), that is with the state's institutions, society and other agents. The external interaction is largely influenced by the perspective of the group's leadership rather than that of its members. However internal interaction has greater impact due to the influence of the leadership over its members.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists*, pp. 14-16, 137-140.

In accordance with the proposed theory one can determine that the de-radicalization process undergone by "Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah" is a **comprehensive de-radicalization**, as it has applied all three of the above levels. On the ideological level, the group renounced its previous violent radical ideology, and wrote in its stead more moderate literature; on the behavioral level, the group declared a ceasefire and the cessation of the use of violence; on the organizational level, the group permanently dismantled its armed mechanisms in 2002. This is not the case with regards to the Egyptian Jihad organization, which underwent a partial de-radicalization process. It began in 2007 under the leadership of its founder and former leader, Dr. Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif, known as Dr. Fadl. In the months of February – April 2007, Dr. Fadl made frequent visits to Egyptian prisons in order to persuade the imprisoned group members to re-examine their path and renounce the way of violence. In that same year he even published a book titled "*Document for Guiding Jihad in Egypt and the World*", in which he tried to prove that the use of violence is incorrect and incompatible with Sharia, and that the combative ideology that had guided him in the past was fundamentally wrong. In the book he also harshly criticizes Al-Qaeda and blames it for dividing the Islamic nation. In response to this criticism and due to the fear that the book would influence Salafi-Jihadi circles, Ayman Al-Zawahiri wrote a book that was over 200 pages long and titled "*Al-Tabri'a*" (The Vindication), in which he accuses Dr. Fadl of helping the Crusader Jewish enemy, while on the other hand explaining the rationale and duty to fulfill the commandment of Jihad against the enemies of the Muslim nation. Therefore, Dr. Fadl's efforts did not bring about sufficient results and his success was declared as partial due to the insistence of three factions of the organization in continuing to adhere to their previous path. However, the willingness of the rest of the Islamic Jihad factions to undergo a de-radicalization process has influenced the willingness of other Salafi-Jihadi groups in Egypt to undergo this process. In other words, the de-radicalization process undergone by Salafi-Jihadi groups may generate a "domino effect" and influence other Islamic Jihadi groups to undergo the same process.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed review of the process this group underwent, see: Ibid, pp. 102-107. Amr Hamzawy & Sarah Grebowski, "From Violence to Moderation: Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah and Al-Jihad", Carnegie Papers, Number 20, April 2010.



**Sayyid Imam Al-Sharif – Dr. Fadl**

This document wishes to use the above-mentioned theory in order to examine the de-radicalization process undergone by the well-known Libyan terrorist group – the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) as of November 2006. Its peak was in September 2009 with the publishing of a new book written by members of the group during their stay in the Libyan prison. The book contained a re-examination of the core principles connected to the idea of Jihad, as well as on the use of the strategy of Takfir against regimes, and more. The book represents a turning point in the group's way of thinking and in its path, constituting a new phase in the war on terrorism.

### **Historical Background: The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)**

Much like other Islamic terrorist organizations, the LIFG aspired to topple the existing regime, in this case that of Mu`amar Gaddafi, and establish an Islamic religious regime in Libya. The formation of the organization began upon the return of the Libyan Mujahideen in 1990 from the battlefields of Afghanistan in the war against the Soviets.<sup>8</sup> Upon their return they displayed an ambition to implement Sharia law in Libya on the ruins of Gaddafi's rule, which was perceived by them to be a corrupt tyrannical regime.<sup>9</sup>

As of 1993, Abdullah Al-Sadiq (Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj), who later became the group's Amir, recruited returning Mujahideen under one umbrella organization called "Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah Al-Muqatilah fi-Libya". Soon the group became the largest Islamic organization opposing the Libyan government. Despite its size the organization preferred to operate in complete secrecy, but in 1995 its activities were exposed by the authorities following the discovery of the group's weapons arsenals. Following this exposure and in view of the Libyan government's determination to dismantle it quickly, four months later the group officially declared its establishment and the launching of an armed struggle against Gaddafi's regime. This led to the eruption of four years of bloody conflict between the forces of the Libyan Army and the organization members. Gaddafi himself survived several assassination attempts by the organization. It should be noted that despite the bloody war, the LIFG refrains from attacking the civilian Libyan population, unlike other Islamic groups such as those in Algeria. In 1999 Gaddafi declared his regime's success in eliminating the armed Libyan Islamists in his country and in inflicting a fatal blow on the LIFG. Following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the Libyan government expanded the scope of the fighting against the members of LIFG outside of Libya's borders as part of the anti-

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<sup>8</sup> In a special interview the Al-Arabiya network held on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2008 with Noman Benotman, one of the group's senior members who served as a member of its Shura Council, Noman mentions the years 1985 – 1986 as the beginning of the group's formation following the actions of young people in the country who identified greatly with the concept of Jihad and wished to translate it into action. Therefore, they left for Afghanistan in order to participate in the war and upon their return to Libya fulfilled a central role in the establishment of the LIFG. A significant part of these youths was medical and engineering students who did not complete their studies due to their leaving for the war in Afghanistan. <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2008/07/06/52638.html>

<sup>9</sup> For more extensive detailing of the origins of the LIFG, see: <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefalifg1007.pdf>

terrorism campaign led by the United States and its allies. Libya expressed its willingness to collaborate with the U.S. in order to apprehend the rest of the LIFG terrorist organization members who continued their subversive actions against Gaddafi's regime from outside of Libya. As part of the cooperation between the U.S. and Libya, the CIA gave the Libyan authorities a list of 14 active LIFG leaders residing in London. With the occupation of Iraq the U.S. added the LIFG to the list of terrorist organizations that should be fought. In 2004 the Americans succeeded in apprehending the organization's Amir, Abdullah Al-Sadiq, who was later extradited to the Libyan authorities. From November 2006 one can detect the beginning of attempts to create a dialogue between the group members and the Libyan authorities.

### **The LIFG and Al-Qaeda**

It should be noted that in the first year following the declaration of the founding of the LIFG, Osama bin Laden opposed any armed activity meant to topple the Libyan government or personally hurt Gaddafi. He even made the categorical demand of the LIFG members that they cease not only their armed activity but also their propaganda against the Libyan government. This was because Bin Laden saw Libya as a cause of worry and discomfort to the U.S., which could have the ability and means to sabotage its interests in the Middle East. As an alternative he offered them Algeria as a location for them to shift their activity.<sup>10</sup> However, the LIFG members rejected his request and did not acquiesce to Al-Qaeda's attempts at enticing them to join its ranks, although some of the group's members did join. Generally speaking, unlike the outlook Bin Laden wished to promote, the LIFG members gave priority to the struggle against the Libyan government – that is, the near enemy – over the struggle against the U.S. and the West – that is, the far enemy.

In November 2007, after the Libyan government negotiated with the LIFG members as an attempt to persuade them to undergo a de-radicalization process, Sheikh Ayman Al-Zawahiri and a senior member of the LIFG's Shura council who

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2008/07/06/52638.html>



operated in Afghanistan, Sheikh Abu Layth Al-Libi (later killed by an American missile in February 2008 in west Pakistan), published a joint audio message declaring the LIFG's official joining with Al-Qaeda. However, this declaration's credibility was questioned in view of the claim by **Noman Benotman**<sup>11</sup>, (a former senior leader in the LIFG who played a central role in LIFG's de-radicalization process, as will be detailed later on) that the LIFG leadership categorically refuses to operate under Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden's umbrella.<sup>12</sup> In fact, one can view Al-Qaeda's declaration as an expression of distress and concern on the part of its leadership over losing its grip in the Maghreb and the fading of its ideology's allure. In other words, one can view this message as an attempt to sabotage the talks between the Libyan government and the imprisoned LIFG members due to the aforementioned concerns.

### The LIFG's De-Radicalization Process

The initiator and driving force behind the dialogue between the Libyan government and the LIFG members, which began in November 2006, was Mu'amar Gaddafi's second son, Saif Al-Islam. This initiative was part of a vision he shared with his father to create a new Libya. The plan formulated for the execution of the vision was called "Libya al-Ghad" (The plan for tomorrow's Libya).<sup>13</sup> Amongst other things this plan is supposed to neutralize the centers of opposition to the government. It is very likely that Saif Al-Islam wished to reduce and quash Al-Qaeda's influence in his country at the same time. Therefore, he approached the Libyan ideologist, **Dr. Ali Al-Salabi**, who resided at the time in Qatar, asking him to serve as a mediator in the talks between himself and the

<sup>11</sup> In the 1980s he fought as a Mujahid against the Soviets in Afghanistan. With the conclusion of the war he moved his activity to the training camps in Sudan alongside Osama bin Laden. He served as a senior member of the LIFG Shura Council. See a special interview he held with the Al-Arabiya network on July 4<sup>th</sup> 2008:

<http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2008/07/06/52638.html>

<sup>12</sup> Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008.

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=456788&issueno=10659>

<sup>13</sup> Saif Al-Islam supervises this project's progress closely. For more details on the objectives of this plan, see:

[http://gdf.org.ly/index.php?lang=en&CAT\\_NO=105&MAIN\\_CAT\\_NO=1&Page=105&DATA\\_NO=22](http://gdf.org.ly/index.php?lang=en&CAT_NO=105&MAIN_CAT_NO=1&Page=105&DATA_NO=22)

LIFG members incarcerated in the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli.<sup>14</sup> Al-Salabi himself stated explicitly more than once that Saif Al-Islam is the driving force behind the group's de-radicalization process: *"The organization's re-examination did not come from the group's initiative, but was the personal initiative of Dr. Saif Al-Islam Al-Gaddafi, who operated knowing that this armed movement bore arms in the past, used it against the country and spilled blood [...]. Despite all of this he initiated talks with the group with the objective of reaching together a shared vision, for the eradication of violence and laying down the arms, embedded in deep understanding [...] in return for release from prison [...]"*.<sup>15</sup> In another instance he states that: *"One must attribute the success of the group's self-examination to its engineer Saif Al-Islam Al-Gaddafi [...]"*.<sup>16</sup>

In a special and exceptional investigative report conducted over two years for the CNN network, Saif Al-Islam's central role in the dialogue with the LIFG members imprisoned in the Abu Salim prison was analyzed.<sup>17</sup> In order to prove his serious intentions, Saif Al-Islam decided to approach one of the LIFG's most prominent former leaders, **Noman Benotman**, who lived at the time in London, and ask him to take part as a mediator in the talks. In return, Saif Al-Islam promised to vouch for his safety and personal security.<sup>18</sup> In 2008 Saif Al-Islam fulfilled his part of the deal and released 136 activists from prison, about a third of the LIFG members, after they pledged to renounce the use of violence.<sup>19</sup> Noman, on his

<sup>14</sup> Al-Salabi himself, who was close to the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya, was incarcerated in a Libyan jail between 1981 and 1988 due to criticism he made against the Libyan government at the time. After his release he lived in exile, but returned to live in Libya in 2005 following Saif Al-Islam's request he take part in the talks with the LIFG group due to his close acquaintance with the group's leadership. See: Al-Jazeera, "Ali Al-Salabi... The reconciliation efforts in Libya", June 16<sup>th</sup> 2008.

<http://www.aljazeera.net/channel/archive/archive?ArchiveId=1098851>

See also:

<http://www.libya-alyoum.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=17&IdPublication=1&NrArticle=26653&NrIssue=1&NrSection=3>

<sup>15</sup> December 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/showthread.php?t=8158>,

<http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-14-119458.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-117183.htm>

<sup>17</sup> The show was first aired on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2009, and was titled "The Jihadi Code". <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/11/09/libya.jail/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> [http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1256909910828&pageName=Islamyoun/IYALayout](http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1256909910828&pageName=Islamyoun/IYALayout)

<sup>19</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2008/04/2008525134944339764.html>

part, agreed to the request and fulfilled a central role in the talks between the parties.

Noman's willingness to take part in this process and establish peaceful relations with the country as well as Saif Al-Islam's serious intentions regarding a true dialogue, influenced the rest of the LIFG members and encouraged them to join the de-radicalization process.



**Noman Benotman in his days as a Mujahid. He fulfilled a leading role in the dialogue between the LIFG members at the Abu Salim prison.**



**Saif Al-Islam and Noman in a joint interview with the CNN network**

On March 10<sup>th</sup> 2009 the LIFG Amir, Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj (Abu Abdullah Al-Sadiq), published an official announcement from prison, commending Saif Al-Islam's efforts as well as those of the institution headed by the latter, the "Gaddafi

International Charity and Development Foundation<sup>20</sup> (GICDF), in promoting the atmosphere of trust and security between the group members and the state's institutions that was necessary for the success of the talks. According to him, the initiative of these talks was at first seen as "*strange and new*", but the more they continued they succeeded in instilling a feeling of security with the group's members encouraging them to write an in-depth research book in the field of religious law that will "*clarify our point of view on the reality and our role in it, so as to take part in the process of reform and development.*" That is, a book that represents the group members' outlook after a reexamination of their ideology in accordance with the sources holy to Islam.



**Saif Al-Islam, Gaddafi's second son,  
head of the GICDF**



**Abu Abdullah Al-Sadiq –  
the LIFG Amir**

<sup>20</sup> GICDF was established in 2003 through the signing of its article of association in Geneva, Switzerland. It's an international non-governmental organization, and carries out developmental and humanitarian activities in the social, economic, cultural and human rights fields. For more detailed information regarding this organization see: <http://gdf.org.ly>



The announcement of the group's Amir welcoming Saif Al-Islam's initiative



The announcement issued by the "Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation" on the talks with the LIFG

Following are the names of the group's prominent leaders who joined the talks with the Libyan government:

- a. **Abdullah Al-Sadiq (Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj)**, the group's Amir. Arrested in Thailand in 2004.
- b. **Abu Al-Mundhir (Sami Al-Sa'di)**, the spiritual leader (born in 1966), headed the LIFG Sharia Council. At certain times he also operated as the organization's Deputy Amir and as its official spokesperson. In 2004 was arrested in Hong Kong. He seems to be a very important and influential figure in the organization.



**Abu Al-Mundhir, the spiritual leader**

- c. **Abu Hazim (Khalid Al-Sharif)**, Deputy Amir. Held in Afghanistan's Bagram Air Base prison by the U.S. forces until his deportation to Libya in 2006.
- d. **Miftah Al-Duwwadi (Abd Al-Ghaffar)**.
- e. **Mustafa Qanfid (Abu Al-Zubayr)**, was part of the military leadership.
- f. **Abd Al-Wahab Qayid Idris**. Abu Yahya Al-Libi's older brother, considered to be the number three man in Al-Qaeda.



**The Libyan authorities are releasing a third of the LIFG members incarcerated in prisons in Libya**

### **A Re-Examination of the LIFG Ideology**

The book written by some of the LIFG leaders as part of its de-radicalization process is called: **“Corrective studies in understanding Jihad, accountability and the judgment of people”**. The book re-examines the core issues pertaining to the group’s ideology, such as the issue of Jihad, the use of Takfir against ruling governments etc. Not only does it express an ideological revolution in the group’s point of view, but it can also be seen to be an additional step in the campaign against Al-Qaeda’s combative ideology, which causes it to lose potential target audiences.

The Libyan authorities have expressed great interest in the writing of such a book and have allowed the incarcerated LIFG members to have access to extensive religious legal literature so that they could publish the book by themselves from within the prison walls. Al-Salabi said that Saif Al-Islam personally supervised the

book's progress. According to him, this fact does not detract from the book's value as it is well anchored in the sources and relies on the essays of the Ulama greats such as Ibn Taimiyyah, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Hajr Al-Askalani and others.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that the book itself was published only after it had been reviewed by a religious committee comprised of six prominent Ulama from Libya: Faris Al-Sadiq Al-Ghurayni,<sup>22</sup> Dr. Hamza Abu Faris,<sup>23</sup> Dr. Sulayman Al-Birah,<sup>24</sup> Dr. Uqayl Hasan Uqayl,<sup>25</sup> and Dr. Muhammad Ahmad Al-Sharif,<sup>26</sup> as well as prominent Ulama from outside of Libya including: Yusuf Al-Qardawi,<sup>27</sup> Salman Al-Awda,<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Al-Shanqiti<sup>29</sup> and Dr. Ahmad Al-Risuni,<sup>30</sup> so that they could offer their opinion on its contents and authorize its publication. Everyone commended the book's content and gave it religious authorization as a book that correctly reflects the principles of Islam.

Notwithstanding, it should be noted that the book was not well received in several Islamist circles, who accused the Libyan government of exerting

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[http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1248187620393&pageName=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout&ref=body&ref=body](http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1248187620393&pageName=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout&ref=body&ref=body)

<sup>22</sup> A professor of Islamic studies at the Al-Fath University in Tripoli. For a complete version of his statements. see: <http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-118071.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> A professor of religious law at the Sharia Department of the Al-Fath University in Tripoli. For a complete version of his statements. see: <http://islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-117764.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> A professor of Quran interpretation at the Umm Al-Qura University in Mecca. For a complete version of his statements. see: <http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-118358.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> A professor at the Al-Fath University in Tripoli. In his referral to the book he stated that its contents are not new as they express the principles of the Islamic faith, but that the new part in it is the detail it goes into. For his full statements see: <http://islamtoday.net/bohooth/artshow-12-117880.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Secretary of the World Islamic Call Society in Tripoli.

<sup>27</sup> A well-known Egyptian preacher living in Qatar, running the "Islam Online" website ([www.islamonline.net](http://www.islamonline.net)). The website itself states that it has decided to supply a free copy to its readers due to its importance.

[http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1252188088085&pageName=Islamyoun/IYALayout](http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1252188088085&pageName=Islamyoun/IYALayout)

<sup>28</sup> A well-known Saudi preacher who was in the past one of the awakening Sheikhs in Saudi Arabia. He runs the "Islam Al-Youm" website (<http://islamtoday.net>). According to him, the book itself is suited to the Ulama and Sunna point of view. For his full statement see: <http://islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-117418.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Sheikh Dr. Muhammad Al-Hassan Al-Dado Al-Shanqiti, head of the Ulama Council in Mauritania. <http://www.islamtoday.net/salman/artshow-28-118773.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Member of the Islamic Sharia Council in Morocco. According to him, the book's authors showed great courage in admitting that they have been mistaken in the past and for agreeing to leave their wrong path and adhere to the true path "even if the distance between the two is very great". For his full statement see; <http://islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-117677.htm>



psychological pressure on the LIFG members to join the government's plan so as to crush the combative opposition to the government. For instance, Sheikh Ali Balahaj, deputy leader of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, was one of the book's most prominent critics. According to him, the disgraceful conditions of imprisonment were the main catalyst for writing the book, as well as the Libyan government's ambition to crush any serious opposition to the government: *"We do not know what the living conditions are of these Muslims who re-examined the organization's ideology. They usually live under psychological, security and family stress. I myself was incarcerated for 18 years and naturally know all of these pressures. The prisoner may turn to these methods, wishing to be depicted as someone who has made a mistake so as to be released from jail. Therefore I believe that the re-examination of the ideology occurring behind bars is flawed as it is an act taken under psychological, security and family stress."* According to Balahaj, one should doubt the willingness of the LIFG members to write the book and one should view it only as a result of security directive, *"Therefore I ask myself why did they not release them first, so that they are given room for propaganda and Da'awa so that they conduct the re-examination of their ideology in daylight and not in the prison darkness?"*<sup>31</sup>

In response to these accusations Al-Salabi claimed that these criticisms are without foundation and that the book was not written due to security pressures, but following the LIFG's deep self-examination of their ideology and after internalizing that adhering to the path of violence is fundamentally wrong.<sup>32</sup> However, he agrees with Balahaj's claim that it would have been better if the organization members had composed the book outside of the prison walls, even though in his eyes writing it from within prison walls does not detract from its value or the motivations for its writing. According to him *"generations of young people will benefit from it and find in it guidance as to how to serve their great religion. We know from our ancient and modern history that there are books which were written from inside prisons and which the nation has received as it has received some of Ibn Taimiyyah's books, may Allah's mercy be upon him, and those of several other religious clerics, and from modern times, "Under the shadow of the Quran" by the Shahid Sayyid Qutb, Allah's' mercy be upon him."*

<sup>31</sup> December 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/showthread.php?t=8158>, <http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-14-119458.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Al-Salabi added further that the book itself has received the blessing of some of the most prominent religious clerics of modern times and that it is better to lend a hand to this blessed initiative, meant to bridge the gaps and mediate between the Libyan government and the Islamic movement in the country.<sup>33</sup>

With regards to this, Al-Salabi wished to clarify that the members of the Ulama Council who examined the book did not exert any pressure on its authors. He further added that despite the similarity between the de-radicalization process undergone by the LIFG group and that of the Egyptian Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyyah group, the former did not rely at all on the latter's literature and did not copy anything from it. Furthermore, according to him the group has risen above itself and had the courage to admit its past mistakes, especially regarding carrying weapons against the state.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that Al-Salabi himself issued a fatwa stating that it is wrong to leave the LIFG members in jail after they have re-examined their ideology and published a book on the matter, delineating a moderate ideology opposing the use of violence.<sup>35</sup>



**Dr. Ali Al-Salabi held a significant position in mediating the talks between the Libyan government and the LIFG**



**Ali Balahaj**

<sup>33</sup> December 9<sup>th</sup> 2009, <http://www.atahadi.com/vb/showthread.php?t=8158>,  
<http://www.islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-14-119458.htm>

<sup>34</sup> [http://islamyooun.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA\\_C&cid=1248187620393&pageName=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout&ref=body&ref=body](http://islamyooun.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1248187620393&pageName=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout&ref=body&ref=body)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.libya-alyoum.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=17&IdPublication=1&NrArticle=26653&NrIssue=1&NrSection=3>

## The Book's Structure and Content



The book was published on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 under the auspices of the Libyan government and with the supervision of the "Al-Gaddafi Foundation for Development" headed by Gaddafi's second son, Saif Al-Islam. The book was printed in hardcopy and was even uploaded in its entirety to the internet for free downloading, which Al-Salabi requested of Saif Al-Islam. Al-Salabi says that Muammar Gaddafi himself received a copy of this book.<sup>36</sup> The book, 434 pages long, was written by some of the group's most senior leaders during their incarceration in the Abu Salim prison in Libya:

- a. **Abdullah Al-Sadiq (Abd al-Hakim Belhaj)**, the group's Amir.
- b. **Abu Al-Mundhir (Sami Al-Sa'di)**, the spiritual leader, headed the LIFG Sharia Council. At certain times he also operated as the organization's Deputy Amir and as its official spokesperson.
- c. **Miftah Al-Duwwadi (Abd Al-Ghaffar)**.
- d. **Abd Al-Wahha Muhammad Qaid**.
- e. **Mustafa Qanfid (Abu Al-Zubayr)**.
- f. **Khalid Muhammad Al-Sharif**, a military and security leader in the group.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.libya-alyoum.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=17&IdPublication=1&NrArticle=26653&NrIssue=1&NrSection=3>

According to the authors the current book wishes to present a detailed discussion and a comprehensive re-examination of the roots of Sharia, such as the issue of Jihad for God etc. The authors did not wish to settle for the presentation of conclusions, lessons and opinions or for referring the readers to religious literature, as according to them, settling only for that misses their point. "We want man to acquire the ability to evaluate things and choose independently later on" in accordance with the sources.

The book's preface states that throughout history the Muslims were unanimous regarding the lofty position of the Islamic religion, supposed to serve as a guiding authority in their lives. Not only that, the Muslims acknowledge that man's efforts in understanding the religion and implementing its laws throughout history have contributed to a certain extent to a deviation from the religion, resulting in mistakes and errors. According to the group, the incompatibility between the stature of Islam amongst the Muslims in the past – during its golden age – and the stature of Islam at present is "a result of the distancing from the path of adherence to Allah's religion, which was in the past a cause in the rise of the Islamic nation [...]". Therefore, one should aspire to return to its roots and correct the path of the Muslims. The book's authors declare that they wish to illuminate the right path for the believers based on the extensive experiences they have accumulated in the past, and to bring them from the darkness in which they were up to now. According to them, the palpable absence of the Ulama and the appropriate publication mechanisms and other means of Da'awa do not help in guiding the believers to the true path and in mending their ways. This is what, according to the authors, this book is supposed to provide an answer to.

The book's authors are also facing the question of how they so drastically changed their point of view and position, which was already based on Sharia. The authors wish to clarify that all along the way, including during the change they underwent, they acted in accordance with Sharia and not for personal motives or due to material goals, and that it was guiding them all along. According to them, the familiarity with the mystery of the religion grew with time as well as their life experiences. **Therefore, after a meticulous and in-depth examination of Sharia over the years, they have reached a new insight as to the**

**principles of the religion as well as regarding the changing reality.** These insights, according to them, are expressed in the book and reflect their wish to *"delineate clear signs for anyone wanting to walk the path through which he can serve his religion and nation [...]."*

The book is divided into 9 chapters, and each chapter contains several subtopics:

a. The first chapter: **"The Covenant of Islam and how it is established"**.

In this chapter the group leaders discuss the reasons and laws for the exclusion of certain Muslims defined as seceding from the Islamic religion. These individuals are considered heretics, and the letting of their blood is allowed.

In their eyes, belonging to Islam is valid as long as three parameters are maintained:

1. Giving the testimony, that is "there is no other God than Allah and Muhammad is God's messenger". As evidence to this claim, many excerpts are quoted from the Quran and Sunna. For example the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned as someone who spared the lives and possessions of pagans who agreed to make this testimony.
2. Unique signs testifying to one's belonging to Islam such as prayer, clothing etc.
3. Having Muslim parents.

Towards the conclusion of the chapter emphasis is put on the prohibition on examining the extent of a Muslim's faith, and that one should settle for these parameters in determining whether a person is Muslim or not. The determination of each condition or parameter is a deviation and distortion of the principles of Islam. Harsh criticism is apparent towards those exaggerating the religion's edicts and taking statements out of context. According to the book, the reason for discussing whether a person is considered to be a true Muslim or not stems from the blurring of the boundaries between the role of preacher and the role of Qadi and Mufti, that is – between the role of advocacy and the judicial role. A preacher, who appropriates the right to rule in religious matters, ruthlessly hurts Sharia. In other words the leadership wishes to use the term "preachers, not judges" throughout the book. This was apparently influenced by

Hadeibi's book, leader of the moderate faction of the Muslim Brotherhood, who wrote a book with the same title as a criticism of Sayyid Qutb's ideology, who sanctified the principle of Takfir against the presiding government and society, claiming their Muslim faith is tainted.

- b. The second chapter: "**Knowledge and the Scholars**" (*'ilm wa'l-**ulama***). In this chapter the group discusses the importance of the knowledge of Sharia in the lives of the individual Muslim and the Muslim nation. It essentially criticizes the haste and daring in issuing judgments declaring heresy against Muslims allowing their blood and property. According to the group, the lack of knowledge of the Sharia or the ignoring of it is one of the main reasons for mistakes and errors contradicting the Sharia.
- c. The third chapter: "**The Call to God**". In this chapter the leadership attributes the utmost importance to Da'awa due to its goal of guiding and leading the people towards Allah's religion. That is why it precedes in its importance Jihad for Allah. Furthermore, Da'awa is a collective commandment. According to the leadership, there are many means today at the disposal of Da'awa.

The leadership also stresses that the preacher's role is supposed to be limited to giving sermons and that he must not appropriate the judicial role which is supposed to be filled by a Qadi or Mufti. In its eyes, erasing the distinction between these two areas may result in a negative outcome that contradicts the Sharia, such as applying a ruling of heresy on a Muslim. According to the group, a very small segment of the "*Islamic awakening youth*" prefers to ignore Da'awa and instead focus on judging people. Therefore, this chapter is important in itself to clarify how important the distinction between Da'awa and judgments is.

- d. The fourth chapter: "**Jihad for Allah**" (***Al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah***). In this chapter the leadership discusses the term "Jihad" and lists 13 different types of Jihad, such as Jihad of the soul. According to the group, one should remember that combative Jihad is comprised of rules and ethics

that must be adhered to, such as the forbiddance on killing women, children, the elderly and monks, and the duties to fulfill agreements and to treat hostages appropriately, along with other examples. However, it should be emphasized that in this chapter the leadership wishes to make a distinction between offensive Jihad or combat (killing), and defensive Jihad. According to the group, reducing the meaning of Jihad to fighting with weapons is fundamentally wrong and displays a deficient understanding of the religion. In the sub-title of this chapter "*The armed operation between yesterday and today*", the leadership expresses its deep regret for the loss of the lives of dozens of Libyan citizens due to the violent combative stance it took in the past in order to change the existing political order. Therefore, the leadership states that the use of force against the authorities is not allowed. Furthermore, the right to use it is reserved exclusively to the authorities and civilians may not use it. As a rule it claims that there is an overall ban on participating in fighting when the two parties are Muslims fighting each other, as one of the devastating ramifications of the Fitna (civil war) is a division of the Muslim nation. They believe that the best guarantee for changing the existing or any political order is by exercising patience, Da'awa and the commandment to do what is allowed and not do what is prohibited. The leadership also rejects offensive Jihad against heretics and claims that Da'awa is the key to change even heretics. However, the leadership validates defensive Jihad and justifies its existence in case of aggression: "*Those who wish to completely abolish the concept of fighting in Islam wish to eliminate the defensive military power of this religion*". Furthermore, according to the sources holy to Islam the duty of Jihad befalls every Muslim in certain instances: "*If the infidels invade one of the Muslim countries then all the people of the land must repel the enemy and drive him out of their country [...], such as Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan*" or if the leader calls on his people to go on a Jihad war. In their eyes, fighting in Islam is meant to preserve the Islamic religion and protect the Muslims against outside aggression, such as an occupation or invasion of Muslim territory. Therefore, defensive Jihad is legal and accepted not only by the Muslim nation, but also by the rest of the world's nations.

- e. The fifth chapter: **"Differences in Legal Opinions"** (*fiqh Al-khilaf*). In this chapter the group emphasizes the need for settling the existing conflicts within the Muslim nation, in particular the legal ones. According to the group, the lack of an ordered ethical code for the conduct of a proper dialogue between the various legal schools of thought for the settling of legal disagreements has a negative contribution and deepened the chasm amongst the nation and corrupted the Da'awa for God. According to the group one can view controversy as a constructive factor and not as a destructive one, but at the same time the rules of debate should be ascribed maximum importance and it should be conducted in accordance with a certain ethical code so as to preserve the unity of the Muslim nation. Furthermore, not understanding its importance may lead to a mistaken understanding of the religion and to exaggeration. This could lead to the ruling of extreme and erroneous verdicts, such as Takfir, and to other negative ramifications such as fanaticism.
- f. The sixth chapter: **"Religious Extremism"** (*Al-ghuluw*).<sup>37</sup> In this chapter the group criticizes the extremism within the principles of the religion, which it deems to be inappropriate and even contradictory to its perception of the spirit of the religion. For example, the tendency to overly-oppress the spirit or the permission to harm anyone breaching its principles are two examples. According to the group the reasons for the exaggeration vary from generation to generation and from one place to the other, and are mainly related to a faulty understanding of the religion and of reality. They are also due to the existence of flawed norms and customs within the Muslim society, in the lack of comprehensive education, in the distance from the Ulama and more. However, the most important reason stems from the shortage of Ulama in the fields of guidance and leadership. The group wishes to emphasize the importance of the Ulama's role in the society, which is supposed to serve as a key figure in formulating the image of the society and of the youth in particular. According to the group, charlatans are quick to fill the void in the absence of the Ulama, and they issue fatwas without having received proper legal training. From there the path is short to exaggeration in

<sup>37</sup> Pp. 258–284.



religion and to the inevitable result: intellectual and legal chaos. Furthermore, the exaggeration itself sabotages the quality of the relationship between the believer and his sovereign, making Da'awa for God something to be disdained and instilling division amongst the Muslims, wherever they are.

- g. The seventh chapter: **The Objectives of Islamic Law, Jurisprudence of Balances and Considering the Implications.** In this chapter the group emphasizes the negative ramifications of the erroneous implementation of Sharia, stemming from misunderstanding in areas such as armed conflicts.

According to the group, the Sharia is for the purpose of providing the needs of the believers and to distance them from corruption, and therefore it is important to examine Sharia's intentions. A faulty understanding of the Sharia, which the group states it had in the past, leads to faulty implementation which harms the interests of the believers. According to the group, the parameters which may lead to a faulty understanding of the Sharia must be noted:

1. Ignoring the ramifications of certain actions. According to the group, when there is a desire to act on behalf of the Islam and to strive for a certain goal that benefits the believers, one must first examine if the means used are appropriate and compatible with Sharia.
2. A misunderstanding of the interests of the general Muslim population. A group wishing to achieve a certain goal must check to see if its interests are compatible with those of the entire Muslim nation. The interests of the entire Muslim nation are supposed to be elevated above the interests of groups and individuals, and set the tone. If there is a possibility of conflict between the interests, the interest of the entire nation should be given priority, as *"the blood of the Muslims, their property, honor, security and stability are maintained according to the Sharia due to their being Muslim and not because of what they are doing for the religion."*<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> p. 341.

3. Not learning the lessons of the past. One should learn and deduce from the outcome of certain actions so as to avoid mistakes in the future. For example, the early wise Muslims deduced that rebelling against the ruler was not a good thing. Learning from past experiences will benefit Islam and the Muslims, and will work in their interest. According to the group, a misunderstanding of the Sharia begets negative results, the first of which is the bloody conflict between the Muslims. This is a clear violation of the Sharia as it explicitly forbids an internal war between the Muslims. In fact, the group claims that internal conflicts are harmful both on the internal level and on the external one. On the first level, the unity of the Muslim society is undermined, its unity is damaged, and its resilience is diminished. Not only that, but a critical blow is apparent in the levels of Da'awa activity as many members of the Muslim nation are killed or imprisoned as a result of internal strife. On the second level, a diminishing in the field of Da'awa is also apparent. The image of Islam is severely tarnished as a result of the hostility amongst the Muslims and it is no longer appealing to non-Muslim nations, who view it negatively. Thus, a potential target audience for Islamic Da'awa is lost and these foreign nations will dare to intervene in the internal affairs of the Islamic countries as a result.
  
- h. The eighth chapter: **Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong**. In this chapter the group discusses the commandment in Islam which obligates the removal of improper conduct within the society, and the sustaining of the commandments of Islam. The group believes that its implementation is very important but that it should be performed in accordance with the Sharia and at the same time ensuring that the nation's interests are unharmed. If a Muslim wishes to mend the ways of another, he must do so pleasantly and he must be patient and tolerant when giving advice. The group severely criticizes the use of weapons as a method of changing the ways of Muslims, and states that the Sharia explicitly forbids it. According to the group, the right to use force is only given to the ruler.

- i. The ninth chapter: **Passing Judgment on People**. In this chapter the group wishes to clarify the danger in passing the authority to punish/sentence people "who have sinned" into the hands of individuals or groups in the Muslim society. The group maintains that extending this right to judge opens a gateway to a bloodbath and social chaos due to the easiness of the use of the weapon of Takfir (i.e. allowing the killing of a Muslim, expropriating his property and finances, etc). The group claims that the harsh types of punishments used against Muslims who have "transgressed", such as execution, contradict the Sharia. The damage done by this surpasses the benefit as it does not contribute to the strengthening of Muslim society.

Overall, the group claims that if it seems a man is about to be sentenced one must first conduct a meticulous examination of his actions and weigh their severity. According to the group, a mistaken estimate stemming from ignorance of Islamic law is equal to heresy. It is also mandatory to clarify that the act was indeed carried out by the accused to ensure that there is truth in the accusations. Another factor that should be taken into account is the context and the background of the "transgressor". According to the group, it is possible that the "transgression" itself was carried out due to ignorance, lack of knowledge or a misinterpretation etc.

According to the group, only the ruler has the authority to sentence people. The group claims that in this situation it is also better to focus on the field of Da'awa and to stay away from any pretense at being a judge: *"Islam has commanded all the Muslims to serve as preachers for Allah to the extent of their ability, activity and circumstances [...] The task of this nation is to preach to Allah in the permissible legitimate ways so that it mends itself and is saved from the other nations"*.

### The Group's Conclusions:

1. The other Islamic resurrection movements must toe the Ulama line, wishing to serve the interests of their countries and people and to help them in spreading Sharia knowledge.
2. The growth of a nation is based on patience and tolerance, in investing efforts and in time. The solution for the problem of Islam's diminishing power, which for multiple reasons has been going on for many centuries, is not in quick solutions or miracle drugs, but in hard work over a long period of time.
3. The nation's interests should be recognized, preserved and not exaggerated. For example, unity amongst Muslims, guarding their honor, stability, security and the reputation of Islam and its believers. *"If guarding them contradicts a certain small interest, then there is no question one should abandon the small interests."*
4. The Sharia itself has certain demands, such as the duty to guide the people, spread Islam, glorify people, do good and more. To that end several steps should be taken, such as the commandment to do what is known and forbid what is reprehensible, to strive for the Lord and more.

### The LIFG's De-Radicalization Process as Seen by Al-Salabi

On April 2010, in a special interview with one of the Libyan websites, Al-Salabi summarized the de-radicalization process undergone by the LIFG group. In the interview he mentions the factors he believes helped its success:

- a. **The will of Allah.**
- b. **Saif Al-Islam**– the main and most meaningful factor in the beginning of the talks and their success. According to Al-Salabi, Saif Al-Islam came to the talks with extensive experience in negotiations and various enterprises which had been deemed successful, such as his success in releasing the hostages in the Philippines and his accomplishment in convincing the security forces in the country to release the incarcerated Muslim Brotherhood members. According to Al-Salabi, these achievements influenced Islamist circles in the country such as the Muslim Brotherhood,

who viewed Saif Al-Islam's sincere efforts in acting on their behalf. The Muslim Brotherhood then made sure to inform the incarcerated LIFG members of Saif Al-Islam's sincere intention in having them released. From that point *"Dr. Saif Al-Islam became a convincing figure with the group, with the security forces and with the mediator himself which was me. I learned that he has the decency and dedication necessary for the success of the talks."*

- c. **The group's leadership**, especially the figures of Sheikh Sami Al-Sa'di and Sheikh Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj. According to Al-Salabi, these two figures were incarcerated following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and were well informed and updated during their time of incarceration as to the goings on in Afghanistan and the changes that occurred in Jihadi thought when it had to face the new reality which had been forced upon it. *"Therefore, the LIFG leadership differs from those who were in jail, as they were cut off from the outside world. The fact these brothers were in jail and the encounter between them and the rest of the prison population gave them an intellectual advantage in the discussions and talks held. This was also a significant factor that supplemented the way they conducted this initiative with dedication and fairness."*
- d. **Collaboration with the security forces**. The talks were also attended by members of the security forces such as Saleh Al-Masri, Al-Quilani and Sabri Ahalila, who asked for certain clarifications from the incarcerated LIFG members.
- e. **The return of the exiled group leaders to Libya**. According to Al-Salabi, the return of the LIFG group leaders, such as Noman, to Libya after a long exile abroad, enabled the understanding reached with the country and Saif Al-Islam. *"With his [Noman's] return and the understanding arrived at with the state and the ties with Dr. Saif Al-Islam, he could visit the brothers in jail and take part in the talks when they began. I hereby testify to history that brother Noman worked diligently for the success of talks so that our brothers be released from jail. In addition, the return of brothers Abu Bakker Armila and Nasser Al-Gerari, who are also part of the LIFG group and their visit to their brothers in jail, point to the reconciliation between them and the state."*

- f. **Secondary causes.** Meaning the external mediator, a role filled by Al-Salabi. According to Al-Salabi, he was appointed as a mediator in these talks due to his acquaintance with some of the LIFG group leaders and with Saif Al-Islam, who had faith in him. For example, he held talks with Abd Al-Hakim on the wrong use of violence. All this was under the watchful eye of the Libyan security forces. Al-Salabi says that he fulfilled this role faithfully out of commitment to his Libyan homeland and due to the humanitarian interest in alleviating the suffering of those incarcerated and to bring about a resolution to the suffering of the prisoners' families. *"Due to all of these factors I had no choice but to invest true efforts, especially when the group trusted me. In view of the previous acquaintance and the warm ties between me and the group's leadership."*
- g. **The prison warden.** Khalifa Arhuma, the prison warden, gave his blessing and helped the success of these talks, creating trust between him and the group.
- h. **Providing the possibility to examine the sources.** This refers to the extensive allocation of literature regarding Jihadi thought to the incarcerated group members, helping them re-examine their previous ideology and writing a new ideology instead. According to him, the group members were allocated an electronic encyclopedia of 12 thousand books with a search option.
- i. **The prayers of righteous people.** This refers to the prayers made by the relatives of the prisoners and of anyone who accompanied these talks and wished for their success.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Libya Al-Yaum, April 8<sup>th</sup> 2010: <http://www.libya-alyoum.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=17&IdPublication=1&NrArticle=26653&NrIssue=1&NrSection=3>



**Leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) explain their decision to renounce violence at a press conference in March 2010**



**Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj at a press conference in March 2010**

## Epilogue

At the end of January 2010 it seemed that Gaddafi's regime was not going to keep its obligation to release the imprisoned LIFG members (about 300 of them) due to fears that they still constituted a threat to the security of the state and society, as well as worries that they would revert to their old ways and continue the terrorist attacks. In a speech given by Gaddafi to the Libyan Parliament towards the end of January 2010, he stressed that public safety and the interests of society supersede any other consideration and that he is committed to ensuring them. According to him: *"When they are released they will continue to blow things up and assassinate. They will disperse across Libya and walk towards Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Afghanistan and to other countries around us. They will return and recruit others. The entire world is now fighting this terrorist network... How can we release them without thinking of society's interests? The society's interests are above all".*<sup>40</sup> This position was criticized by Al-Salabi, who claimed that Gaddafi's mistake did not end with his decision not to honor the agreement, but is also in his erroneous claim that the LIFG members may return to terrorist activity and even team up with Al-Qaeda. In an interview to the daily newspaper "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat" Al-Salabi stated that: *"They renounced the use of violence and bearing arms against the state in Libya. People expect the state to fulfill its obligation regarding their release [...]"*.<sup>41</sup>

However, this fear turned out to be groundless when Saif Al-Islam announced at a press conference held on March 24<sup>th</sup> 2010 in Tripoli, attended by some of the group's leaders, the release of 214 additional LIFG prisoners, including the group's Amir Abd Al-Hakim Belhaj and another of the group's military leaders, Khalid Muhammad Al-Sharif.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For Gaddafi's entire speech, see: oea, January 28<sup>th</sup> 2010:

<http://www.oelialbya.com/front-page/local-news/14485-2010-01-28-15-09-12>

<sup>41</sup> Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, January 30<sup>th</sup> 2010:

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=11386&article=555056>

<sup>42</sup> Oea, March 24<sup>th</sup> 2010: <http://www.oelialbya.com/front-page/local-news/16577-2010-03-24-12-45-16>





**Members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group walk out upon their release from Abu Salim prison in Tripoli March 24, 2010**

### Summary and Conclusions

It is too early to estimate the extent of the success of the de-radicalization process undertaken by Libya in the face of the LIFG group. The significant Libyan achievement constitutes another layer in the knowledge accumulated on facing Islamic terrorist organizations, the action strategies and the ways of their implementation. A comparative analysis between the Libyan case and the other cases mentioned above and the parameters presented by Ashour in his book, teaches that the LIFG has undergone a comprehensive de-radicalization process. This was due to the successful implementation of all three levels: the ideological level, the behavioral level and the organizational level. It was also due to the complete implementation of all four of the vital parameters for the commencement of the de-radicalization process and its success (mentioned above in this review):

1. "Recruitment" by the Libyan government of senior charismatic leaders from the LIFG terrorist organization, who have great influence over the group members. These individuals had an impressive military and leadership background, and some of them had religious authority. The

success of the Libyan government in recruiting Noman to its plans is clear testimony to that.

2. An intensive oppression of the LIFG members by the Libyan regime. The Libyan government exercised a firm hand from the moment the LIFG's activity had been uncovered in 1995. Its success in incarcerating many of them was also thanks to a security and intelligence collaboration with the western countries. Abu-Salim Prison, notorious for its cruelty towards its inmates, was an additional catalyst in bringing the members to join the de-radicalization process.
3. Providing incentives to the group's members. Saif Al-Islam's promise to give amnesty to the incarcerated group members and to release them from prison constitutes, without a doubt, a significant incentive. In 2008, a third of the LIFG members (136 activists) were released from prison after having committed to renounce the use of violence. In March 2010, 214 additional members were released, and in the upcoming months additional waves of released prisoners are expected. Another incentive is the government's willingness to ensure the integration of the released members in society as well as ensuring their livelihood. This willingness is made clear in the statements made by the manager of the "Al-Gaddafi Foundation for Development", Saleh Abdul Salam, who stated that after their release they will be integrated into society and receive help in finding employment.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the released members of LIFG received a financial grant of 10,000 dinars "to start a new decent life, and 300 dinars each in immediate assistance from the Prison Administration on the day they were released".<sup>44</sup>
4. External interaction: contact with Libyan government representatives, such as Al-Salabi.  
Internal interaction: internal dialogue between the LIFG leadership, especially Al-Balhaj and Al-Mundhir, and its members.

Statements made by Abu Layth Al-Libi and Al-Zawahiri in November 2007 on the merging or joining of the LIFG with Al-Qaeda should be given little credence - as mentioned above, they can be viewed as an attempt to sabotage the dialogue

<sup>43</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2008/04/2008525134944339764.html>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=1&id=13323>

between the LIFG members and the Libyan government. Not only that, they were refuted by Noman. One should also remember that the highest level of the group's leadership was involved in the de-radicalization process, including the group's Amir, Balhaj, and its spiritual leader, Al-Mundhir, who have great influence over its members and continue to provide the tone of the group.

In the group's abandonment of the path of terrorism, as expressed in the book written by its leadership, there are a number of implications and ramifications for the near and distant future:

- a. Neutralizing a combative opposition dangerous to the stability of the Libyan government.
- b. A new phase in the group's path. Reconciliation with society, and willingness to be recruited for its building.
- c. Influencing the youth's way of thinking. The group's leadership's statements against the use of violence and criticizing Osama bin Laden's path, are without a doubt, affecting the youth of Libya's way of thinking, as well as those outside of Libya, as far as joining terrorist organizations and the use of violence are concerned.
- d. Influencing the way of thinking and ideology of other Islamic terrorist groups. That is, a self-examination or re-examination of the ideology and action patterns of Islamic terrorist organizations.
- e. Leveraging an organized model for coping with the problem of armed radical Muslims in the country. The Libyan government's success in implementing a successful model for dealing with militant Islamic groups can be utilized by other Muslim regimes who are facing this threat. For example, it seems that the Mauritanian government has adopted the Libyan model against armed Islamic groups with regards to the Salafi-Jihadi members imprisoned there. In other words, having intensive talks and an in-depth discussion regarding the nature of their ideology with the objective of bringing about a change on an intellectual and awareness level, which in turn will lead to a de-radicalization process.

It is important that the government keep a close eye on the process of recruitment and involvement of the group's members to ensure that such a threat will not return.