

2 February 2015

## **Islamic State Activity in Libya**

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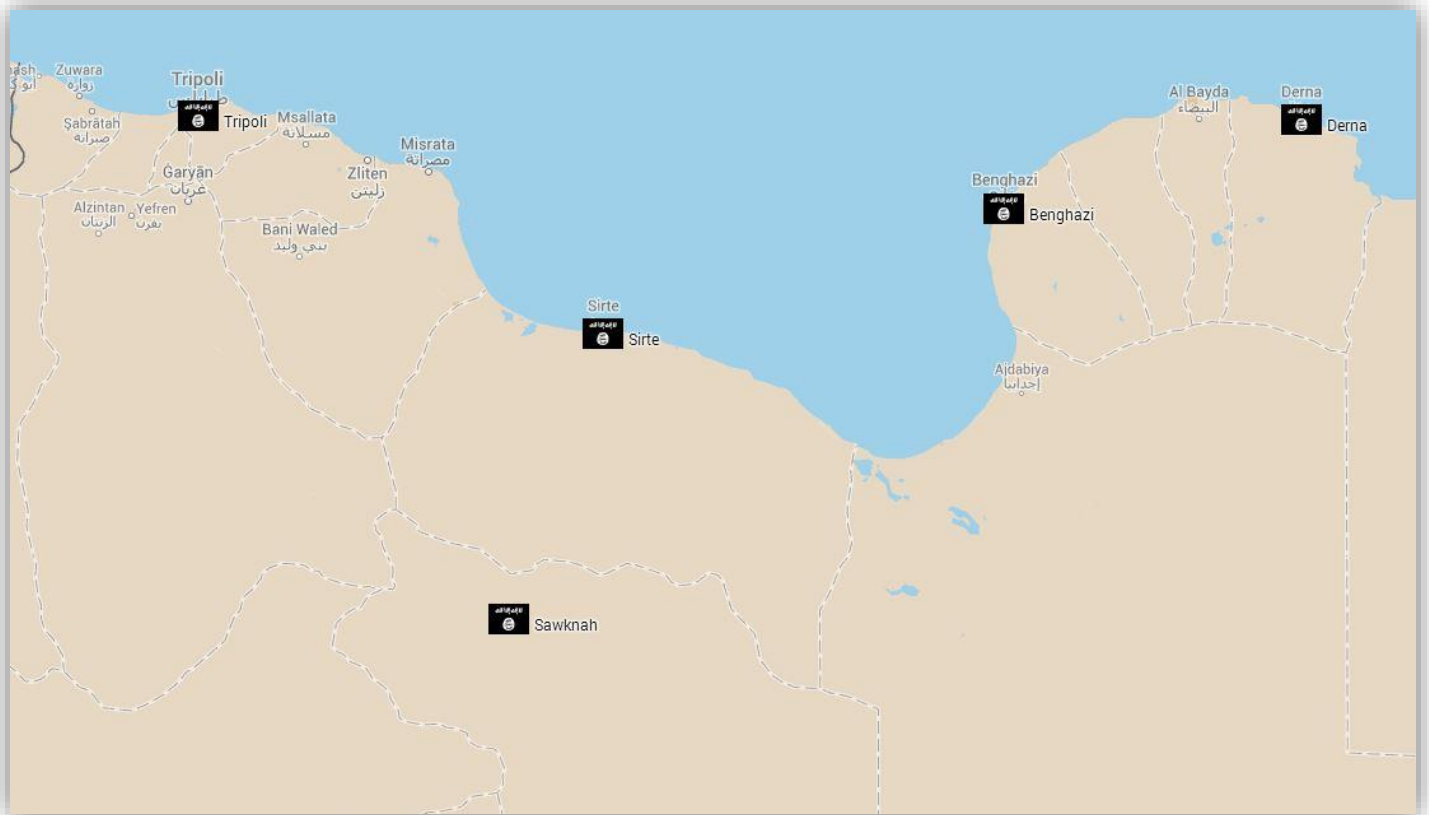


Figure 1 - Locations of Major IS Activities

## ISIS Situation, Expansion, and Strategy in Libya

### Situation

The [attack](#) on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli on 27 January shows that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has considerable influence outside areas originally declared in their “caliphate.” The coordinated attack involved at least one car bomb and two heavily armed gunmen. The two gunmen, one Tunisian and the other Sudanese, were able claim nine victims in the attack. A statement claiming responsibility for the attack



Figure 2-Photos of the Corinthia Hotel released by an ISIS media division

was quickly released by the media division of Wilayat al-Tarabulus, the ISIS’s name for one of the three provinces of Libya.

Following the 2011 revolution, portions of the eastern city of Darnah, a city known for its sympathies for fundamentalist religious groups, had been under the control of Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam (MSSI). Members of MSSI appear to have been the conduit for ISIS representatives to enter eastern Libya. Reports on social media website began showing members of MSSI implementing hisbah (accountability patrols) throughout the city, in a manner mirroring patrols by ISIS members in Mosul and Raqqa. These patrols were first tendrils of ISIS’s presence in Libya. By mid-September 2014 photos posted to social media sites showed several large ISIS parades throughout Darnah. On 3 October 2014, members of MSSI held a large [rally](#) in the center of Darnah declaring *baya* (alligence) to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It was later noted by Atlantic Council research fellow Mohamed Eljarh that a Yemeni named Abu Taleb al-Jazrawey was declared emir of the newly created Wilayat Darnah. This declaration has become the first substantial foothold for ISIS outside of Iraq and Syria. ISIS

representatives have used Darnah as a springboard to spread its affiliates throughout the other provinces of Libya.

## Expansion

The continued political and military chaos in Libya following the ouster of Muammar Ghaddafi in 2011 has provided an ideal situation for extremist organizations such as ISIS to expand throughout Libya. In the months following MSSI's declaration of allegiance to ISIS in October, attacks attributed to other ISIS related groups have occurred across all regions of Libya.

During the week of 9 November 2014, three car bombings and four beheadings were carried out by groups affiliated with ISIS in the eastern province of Barqa.

In December 2014, ISIS affiliates of the Tarabalus province took credit for car bombings outside of the Diplomatic Security Headquarters in Tripoli, later detonating a car bomb outside of the Embassy of Algeria. Later that month, ISIS in Sirte kidnapped a group of Egyptian Coptic Christians.

On 3 January, members of ISIS in Fezzan, Libya's southern province, attacked a Libyan Army checkpoint in Sokhna, killing 14 soldiers and two cooks while they were sleeping.

## Strategy

Aaron Zelin, Richard Barrow Fellow for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, recently stated that ISIS in Libya seems to be attempting to follow the same tactics it so effectively



Figure 3 - A map showing the three provinces to be governed by ISIS in eastern, western, and southern Libya. The image was taken from a post encouraging ISIS supporters to immigrate to Libya.

employed in Iraq and Syria last June. Unlike its predecessor al-Qaeda, ISIS has effectively used media sharing websites such as JustPasteIt, Manbar, and Twitter to continually update its supporters and potential recruits that it is active in the areas under its control. These press releases not only show the results of attacks by ISIS affiliates throughout Libya, but also [show](#) the same organizations distributing *dawa* (charity) to children and the poor. Like in Iraq and Syria, such media publications have been used a powerful tool to build community support and for fighter recruitment.

In regards to recruitment, ISIS has recently launched a large campaign to funnel fighters from other extremist groups within Libya. ISIS's largest target has been Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi. ISIS has released a series of [statements](#) urging the seasoned fighters of Ansar al-Sharia to join ISIS's ranks. This campaign seems to have started following the announcement of the death of Ansar al-Sharia's leader, Mohammed al-Zahawi.



Figure 4 - A photo from an ISIS publication urging Ansar al-Sharia members to pledge baya to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The men are shown wearing the logo of Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi.

## Conclusions

As noted in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of ISIS's online magazine *Dabiq*, its largest foreign base of support is Libya. The drastic increase in bombings, kidnappings, and beheadings throughout Libya by organizations allied to ISIS seems to have proven these claims true. ISIS in Libya has been able to take advantage of the nation's post-revolutionary political turmoil to establish a base of support, though to a lesser degree, using the same tactics as in Iraq and Syria. Like in Iraq and Syria, ISIS in Libya has been able to recruit foreign fighters to join its ranks, as seen at the Corinthia Hotel. Given heavy military setbacks in Kobane and Mosul, coupled with ISIS's heavy campaigning for [immigration](#) to Libya, without careful strategic international and domestic cooperation, Libya could play host as the next bastion for Islamic extremism.

## Week of 25 January 2015

**Sirte** - On 28 January 2015, the Information Office of the Islamic State in Tripolitania releases photos showing new members in Sirte swearing allegiance to the Islamic State. According to the Islamic State, the men shown in the photographs are recent Christian converts.

([Nasher](#))



*Figure 5 - Converts of the Islamic State*

**Tripoli** – On 27 January at approximately 0953 (UDT +2) a VBIED detonated outside of [Tripoli's Corinthia Hotel](#). No casualties have been reported as a result of the explosion. Immediately following the blast five gunmen entered the hotel and engaged in a shootout with local security, leaving at least three guards dead. Witnesses claim that three other hotel staff members were injured. The Associated Press reports that the gunmen have taken three to five hostages on the hotel's twentieth floor.

([AP](#))([Times of Malta](#))

According to the BBC's Rana Jawad, security officials of the Corinthia Hotel have been aware of possible threats for several days. (@[Rana Joi](#)). A tweet posted by an account linked to the Islamic State in Tripolitania claims that the attack was revenge for the death of Abu Anas al-Libi. (@[fulaan akh](#)) The user claims that the attack was directed at the Corinthia Hotel because of its popularity among foreigners. However, hotel staff have stated that the hotel was

“approximately 90% empty.” A security guard told the Associated Press that Omar al-Hassi usually stays at the hotel with security guards, but that they were not present at the time of the bombing and subsequent attack.

Twitter users began posting images that allegedly show some of the gunmen who participated in the attack on the hotel.

([@dovenews](#))

### Week of 18 January 2015

**Benghazi** - On 20 January 2015, IS in Cyrenaica released photos of the distribution of aid in what they allege to be Benghazi.

([Manbar](#))



Figure 6 – IS Passes out Sweets to Children

On 20 January 2015, the Islamic State in Libya released an open letter to Sheikh Abdullah and Sheikh Mamoon.

([Justpaste.it](http://Justpaste.it))

On 20 January 2015, IS in Cyrenaica released a statement showing their most recent Hisba activities in eastern Libya.

([Nasher.me](http://Nasher.me))

**Benghazi** – On 18 January 2015, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released photos showing their most recent military activity in Benghazi.

([Justpaste.it](http://Justpaste.it))

On 18 January 2015, The Islamic State in Libya released a statement dividing Libya into three distinct regions. The statement also calls for foreign members of the Islamic State to travel to Libya.

([Manbar](http://Manbar))



Figure 7 - IS Division of Libya

Week of 11 January 2015

**Tripoli** – On 17 January a VBIED exploded Saturday in front of the Embassy of Algeria in Tripoli, injuring two security personnel.

According to a Libyan security source, the two injured workers, whose condition is not alarming, were quickly transported to the hospital of the capital.

([All Africa](#))

On 17 January 2015, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released photos showing members distributing clothing and financial aid.

([Justpaste.it](#))

**Sirte** - On 12 January 2015, the Islamic State in Tripolitania claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of 21 Christians.

([Telegraph](#))([Justpaste.it](#))



Figure 8 - Photos of the Kidnapped Egyptians

On 11 January 2015, the Islamic State in Tripolitania released photos allegedly showing their Hisba activities somewhere in western Libya. The photos were most likely taken in Sabratha.

([Justpaste.it](#))

## Week of 4 January 2015

On 8 January 2015, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released photos allegedly showing the execution of two Tunisian journalists.

([Justpaste.it](#) – Dead Link)



*Figure 9 - Tunisians Allegedly Executed by IS in Libya*

**Benghazi** – On 7 January 2015, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released photos of recent troop activity throughout Benghazi.

([Justpaste.it](#) – Dead Link)

On 4 January 2015, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released photos showing the execution of a man they labeled as an apostate.

([Justpaste.it](#))



Figure 10 - "Apostate" Executed by the IS

### Week of 28 December 2014

**Benghazi** – On 3 January the Islamic State in Cyrenaica posted photos of their recent destruction to civilian homes throughout Benghazi.

([Manbar](#))

**Sokhna** – On 3 January the Islamic State in Fezzan claimed responsibility for an attack on a Sokhna checkpoint in southern Libya.

([Justpaste.it](#) – Dead Link)([Justpaste.it](#))([Twitter @Morning\\_LY](#))([Libya Herald](#))



Figure 11 - IS in Fezzan Attacks Sokhna

**Tobruk** – On 30 December at approximately 1315 (UDT +2) an explosion occurred outside the headquarters of the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives currently meets in the Dar Al Salam hotel. According to the spokesman for the General Chief of Staff, Ahmed Al-Mismari, the vehicle exploded in the hotel car park and was not a suicide attack as initially suggested. The most current reports state that a total of 19 people were injured as a result of the explosion.

([Twitter @Libya\\_Breaknews](#))([Twitter @aa\\_arabic](#))([Twitter @malekalshrif201](#))([Libya Herald](#))

### Week of 21 December 2014

**Tripoli** – According to multiple sources a VBIED detonated outside of the Diplomatic Security Headquarters in Tripoli in the morning of 27 December. The Diplomatic Security Headquarters is located in the Sidi al-Masry district of Tripoli.

The jihadist Islamic State (IS) organisation said it carried out the bombing, according to the US-based monitoring group SITE Intelligence.

"The provincial division of the Islamic State (IS) for Tripoli, Libya, claimed a car bombing at the diplomatic security building in the capital, and provided a photo of the blast," SITE said.

([Twitter](#)) ([Twitter](#)) ([Yahoo News](#))

### Week of 14 December 2014

**Tripoli** - At approximately 1200 (UDT +2) on 16 December 2014 social media users began circulating a photo alleging to show a car bomb that exploded near the Security Directorate Headquarters in Tripoli. According to accounts from social media no casualties were reported. ([Twitter](#)) On 17 December 2014, the original source claimed that ISIS claimed responsibility for the car bomb via a Facebook page. ([Twitter](#))

### Week of 7 December 2014

**Benghazi** – On 8 December 2014, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica posed photos allegedly showing their progress throughout Benghazi. ([Manbar](#))

### Week of 30 November 2014

**Ajdabiya** - At approximately 1125 (UDT +2) on 1 December 2014, a car bomb exploded outside the Ajdabiya Security Directorate. The security directorate is located near the Ajdabiya city center (30.762741, 20.220089) on al-Modoryia Road. Initial reports suggest that between 3 and 7 people have been wounded. Eyewitnesses report that the vehicle that exploded was a white Hyundai. ([Link](#))([Photos](#))([Photos](#))([Al Wasat](#))

### Week of 23 November 2014

The Islamic State (IS) released the fifth issue of its English magazine “Dabiq,” focusing on the coordinated pledges from jihadi groups in Algeria, Libya, Sinai, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen, and featuring a message attributed to British captive John Cantlie discussing the recent attacks in Australia, Canada, and the U.S., as well as musing what he would do as American President.

In the newest edition, ISIS claims Libya has its strongest presence outside of Iraq and Syria. It continues to state that “an abundance of arms and the condition of mayhem after Gaddafi was ideal for jihad.”

([SITE Intelligence](#))

**Derna** – On 23 November 2014, The Islamic Army, a militia in Derna, has released photos of its recent publicity campaign in Derna. Photos show groups of children meeting with Islamic Army members. In addition, Islamic Army members passed out pamphlets to young men in Derna’s vegetable market. The photos are similar to those released by ISIS members conducting “charity” campaigns in Iraq and Syria.

The Islamic Army is one of the strongest militias present in Derna. Last week they were among many foreign groups from across the Middle East to pledge allegiance to ISIS and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The ISIS magazine Dabiq claims its strongest foreign following is in Derna.

([Manbar](#))

### Week of 16 November 2014

**Yemen** – On 22 November 2014, a statement was released by spokesmen for Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has acknowledged Libyan extremists in Derna pledge to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.

The statement also called for all Libyan “Mujahideen” such as Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi to pledge their support for ISIS and Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.

([Justpaste.it](#))

**Benghazi** – On 16 November 2014, the Islamic State in Libya has released photos of nine suicide bombers who died in Benghazi. According to the photos, five were Tunisian, two were Egyptian, and two were Libyans.

([Manbar](#))

Also, the Islamic State in Cyrenaica released a statement taking credit for the series of VBIED attacks on 12 November 2014, men pledging allegiance to the IS, and photos of a convoy in Derna.

([Manbar](#))([Manbar](#))([Manbar](#))

**Tripoli** - A group in Tripoli claimed responsibility for the bombings of the UAE and Egyptian embassies. The group also posted photos declaring their allegiance to the Islamic State.

([Forum](#))([Manbar](#) – Dead Link) ([Al Wasat](#))

### Week of 9 November 2014

**Tripoli** - At approximately 06:45 (UDT +2) on 13 November 2014, two car bombs exploded near the Egyptian ([Location](#)) and UAE ([Location](#)) embassies in the Al-Seyaheyya and Zawiyat Al-Dahmani neighborhoods of Tripoli. No casualties have been reported, though photos show significant damage to vehicles and buildings near the embassies. Both embassies have been vacant since the inception of Operation Libya Dawn.

([Twitter](#)) ([Twitter](#)) ([Twitter](#)) ([Al Arabiya](#))

**Marj** - On 13 November 2014, three Libyan National Army (LNA) soldiers were slightly injuries as a result of a bomb attack on a checkpoint in Marj.

Mohamed Hejazi, a spokesman for Operation Dignity, told the *Libya Herald* that a gelatina bomb had been thrown at the checkpoint at the Saha Al-Karima roundabout, close to the town's main Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq mosque. The car from which the bomb was thrown then drove away at speed. ([Libya Herald](#)) ([Al Wasat](#)) ([Twitter](#))

**Al Bayda** - At approximately 11:57 (UDT +2) on 12 November 2014, a vehicle carrying explosives detonated at the military checkpoint outside Labraq International Airport. ([Twitter](#)) Eyewitnesses report that after stopping to be searched by security officials, the driver of the vehicle detonated explosives. Current reports state that four members of the military have been confirmed killed.

([Twitter](#))

**Benghazi** - At approximately 12:07 (UDT +2) on 12 November 2014, Twitter user @loayomran, reported the detonation of a car bomb outside of the Al Shalal cafe, located in the Al Majuri neighborhood in central Benghazi. Eye witnesses report that a vehicle loaded with explosives was parked on the street outside the café. Reports indicate that there were no casualties as a result of the bombing, however the café and surrounding shops were destroyed. No indication if the café was the intended target, neighborhoods in central Benghazi have been mostly abandoned due to continued fighting.

([Twitter](#))

At approximately 17:01 (UDT +2) a car bomb was reported discovered in the Ras Obeida neighborhood of Benghazi.

([Twitter](#))

**Tobruk** - At approximately 11:00 (UDT +2) on 12 November 2014, a large car bomb exploded at a crowded intersection, near the Intelligence Headquarters, in Tobruk. ([Twitter](#)) Eye witnesses report the driver of the vehicle refused to stop at a military checkpoint, continuing on to a crowded intersection. ([Twitter](#)) No responsibility has been taken for the attack, and it is not clear if the intersection was the intended target.

At approximately, 11:40 (UDT +2) vehicles damaged by the initial blast exploded at the site of the car bombing. Initial reports suggested a second vehicle was involved in the attack, however later reports proved that there was not a second vehicle involved.

([Twitter](#))

Current reports confirm two people have been killed and at least an additional 20 have been taken for medical treatment.

([Twitter](#))

**Derna** – On 11 November 2014 three young activists have been found beheaded in Derna, in eastern Libya. The three, who had relayed information about the city through social media, had been kidnapped earlier this month. The activists have been named as Siraj Ghatish, Mohamed Battu and Mohamed al-Mesmari.

([BBC](#))

Two of the three activists in Derna had been kidnapped three months earlier.

([Twitter](#))

**Benghazi** – On 11 November 2014 a Libyan Army soldier stationed at Benina Airport was captured, forced to appear on video, and then beheaded. According to Al Wasat, the group responsible calls itself the “Father of Injustice Battalion”.

([Twitter](#)) ([Facebook Video – GRAPHIC](#)) ([Al Wasat](#))



*Figure 12 - Soldier Beheaded in Benghazi*

**Shahat** – At 1405 (UDT +2) November 9, unidentified persons set off 3 car bombs in the city of Shahat in eastern Libya near the building, where the Libyan Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni had talks with special UN envoy to Libya Bernardino Leon. Eye witnesses claimed the perpetrators parked vehicle packed with explosives and detonated them remotely. Though there

was significant material damage, no deaths or injuries were reported. The intended target was the Security Directorate Building.

Days later two suspects from Derna were arrested in connection to the car bombings.

([Reuters](#)) ([Twitter](#)) ([Daily Mail](#))

### Week of 2 November 2014

**Sirte** – The Islamic State in Tripolitania releases photos of lectures given by Turki al-Bin’ali.

([Twitter @Morning\\_LY](#)) ([Justpaste.it](#))

### Week of 19 October 2014

**Derna** - After pledging allegiance to ISIS, Darnah's Islamic Youth Shura Council (MSSI) launches an 'Islamic Court'. The group announced that its leader is a Yemeni named Abu Taleb al-Jazrawey. According to Al-Wasat, Al-Jazrawey moved to Derna in mid-September with a number of senior ISIS members.

([Twitter @Morning\\_LY](#)) ([Twitter @Eljarh](#)) ([Washington Institute](#)) ([YouTube](#))



*Figure 13 - MSSI Launches Islamic Court*

### Week of 17 August 2014

**Derna** – Released on 20 August 2014, a video shows an execution-style killing by an armed group at a football stadium in eastern Libya. An amateur video published on social media sites shows the purported execution of an Egyptian man apparently organized by an armed group called the Shura Council of Islamic Youth in the eastern city of Derna.

([Amnesty](#)) ([YouTube](#))



*Figure 14 - Public Execution in Derna*

### Week of 20 July 2014

**Benghazi** – On 21 July a militia in Benghazi, Libya, has beheaded a Filipino construction worker, allegedly for being a non-Muslim, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said Monday.

The beheading marks the first Filipino death in Libya since the 2011 revolution, according to the department. It is also the first reported beheading in the country since 2011. The construction worker was kidnapped July 15 at a checkpoint in the Gwarsha district of Benghazi.

A department spokesperson told media Monday that the kidnappers demanded a ransom of \$160,000.

([IB Times](#))