The Gates of Tripoli: Power and propaganda in post-revolutionary Libya

Nathaniel Greenberg

Introduction
Standing before a map of the country pinned to a blank wall and framed on one side by the Libyan flag, Khalifa Hifter, Field Marshall of Libya’s transitional government, announced to the world an “official end” to the UN-sponsored National Conference and the commencement of a new military operation to “cleanse” the country of “terrorists, gangs and outlaws”.1 Presenting himself in full military adornment, his torso positioned roughly before the Gulf of Sirte, the lifeline to Libya’s oil production, Hifter asserted that “Operation Dignity” (Ma’rakat al-karama) did not constitute a military coup (inqilab ‘askari) but rather was the full-expression of his “popular mandate” (taufid sha’bi).2 It was February 2014: three years since the beginning of unrest in Libya, a country that would undergo one of the bloodiest experiences of the greater region-wide phenomenon known typically as the Arab Spring. The NATO-led intervention that helped prevent an imminent assault by al-Qadhafi’s forces on opposition groups to the east of Tripoli set in motion a violent civil war in which the murder of the country’s long-time leader, Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi, was but one chapter in the ongoing saga. Hifter, who had returned to Libya following thirty years of exile in the United States, had originally been appointed al-Liwa’, or Major General, of the transitional authority in Tripoli, but he soon broke from the Islamist-led government to recruit his own army in the east of the country. The press conference on 14 February was the first public declaration of his official split from Libya’s UN-backed government.

The Television Coup
Many observers remained unconvinced by Hifter’s rhetorical dance, seeing the launch of “Operation Dignity” (Ma’rakat al-karama) as the beginning of precisely what the Liwa’ had said it was not.3 Reporting from Tripoli for Al-Jazeera, Khaled al-Mahir published a story with the headline “Hifter’s Coup: Real or Media Spectacle?” in which he quotes the head of security for The Government of National in Tripoli as suggesting the timing of Hifter’s announcement—on the eve of the third anniversary of the 2011 uprising and at the same time as demonstrations scheduled to follow Friday prayers—echoed the Egyptian scenario which also began by way of a

---

2 Ibid.

© African Yearbook of Rhetoric 9, 2019, Online ISSN 2305-7785:
“television coup”. Indeed Hifter’s claim to a “popular mandate” closely resembled the rhetorical strategy of Egypt’s Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi who held the ousting of Mohamed Morsie from office on 1 July 2013 was not a military coup per se but rather an expression of “the people’s will” (iradat al-sl’ab). Hifter’s Operation Dignity had no comparable origin to that of the populist Tamarrod campaign that preceded the Egyptian coup but his direct allusion to al-Sisi’s rhetoric signalled a clear affinity with the Egyptian strongman as well as the emergence of a powerful new alliance on Libya’s post-revolutionary landscape.

Figure 1: Khalifa Hifter, YouTube, 14 February 2014

Qadhafi’s Foil
The story of Khalifa Hifter (also spelled ‘Haftar’) in many ways typifies the struggle for power in the post-revolutionary Arab world. A former officer in al-Qadhafi’s regime, he was trained in Russia and ultimately captured in Chad in the late 1980s where he joined alliances with the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (al-Jubha al-Watani l-Ingadih al-Libiyya, NFSL), a group started by the Libyan dissident Muhammad Yusuf al-Muqaryaf and backed by the United States via the CIA. Hifter


5 Egyptian President Abd al-Fattah reacted to Hifter’s 14 February announcement, describing it as an expression of the “people’s will,” a refrain commonly used to describe the 2013 Egyptian coup to unseat the elected government of Mohamed Morsi. See “Hifter yaqabal al-taftwid …”, CNN, 25 May 2014. Retrieved from: https://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/05/25/libya-haftar-newupdates [Accessed 16 October 2019].


had drifted deep into the pages of Libya’s troubled history when protests began against the country’s long-time dictator in February 2011. Retired, in essence, living in exile with a wife and children in the leafy Northern Virginia suburb of Vienna, his return to the country that March mirrored the trend of exiled septuagenarians from across the Arab world whose arrival heralded jubilation at times but also much anxiety. He ascended quickly within the transitional authority, becoming ultimately Commander of Ground Forces—or Field Marshall—of the Transitional Council, but his whereabouts for the past three decades as well as his ideological posture fuelled intense debate. By the spring of 2014 following the launch of Operation Dignity, Russian, Egyptian, Saudi, Emirati and French media were routinely touting Hifter’s victories in the fight against terrorism as an indication of his willingness to stem lawlessness and to restore order. Qatari, Italian, British and American media, in contrast, frequently described him as a “renegade” and a “warlord” who aspired to become “Libya’s next dictator”. Writing for the Egyptian paper Al-Shorouk, Ismael al-Ashul noted that Hifter, once an officer in al-Qadhafi’s regime, had participated with Egyptian forces in the crossing of the Suez in 1973. The Qatari-based Al-Jazeera concluded its 14 February report with reference to Hifter’s relationship with the NFSL, describing Hifter (without evidence) as a “founder” of the organisation’s “military wing” (al-jinah al-askari).

For some observers, Hifter’s 14 February announcement eerily resembled the opening communiqué of Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi’s 1969 coup. Similar to Hifter’s media stunt, the identity and ideology behind al-Qadhafi’s group, which broadcast its first communiqué via radio on the morning of 1 September 1969 became a subject of intense scrutiny among Arab journalists. Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, the journalist and close confidant of Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, recounted how Egyptian officials listened to the initial broadcasts via Al-Ahram’s radio monitor in Tripoli searching for any clue of the officers’ identity. The Egyptians, Heikal wrote, were ultimately able to determine the group’s political identity by way of the slogan they repeated—hurriyya, ishtirakiyya, wahda ("freedom, socialism, unity")— which was thought to distinguish them from their Baathists in Iraq and Syria whose axiom followed in reverse order: wahda, ishtirakiyya, hurriyya ("unity, socialism, freedom"). The Libyan version, Heikal

8 Hauslohrner and Abdel Kouddous, “Khalifa Hifter, the ex-general leading a revolt in Libya, spent years in exile in Northern Virginia”.
12 Al-Mahir, “Inqlab Haftar: Haqqa am isti’rad il’lami?”.
writes, signalled direct alignment with Nasser who held the order of the slogan to be specific because Nasser’s point of view was that “you cannot have unity unless you are free, so that freedom must come first.”

Distinct from Hifter’s communicative identity, al-Qadhafi’s self-narrative was “replete with historical allusions” as Eugene Rogan observed. He portrayed himself as the heir of the anti-colonial champion Omar al-Mukhtar and had thousands of Italians expelled from Libya. American and British military bases (permitted under agreements with King Idris) were closed and abandoned. Even wearing Western-style neckties (as Nasser often did) was condemned and equated with wearing the Christian (Crusader) cross. Al-Qadhafi’s infamous *The Green Book* (*al-Kitab al-akhdar*), which appeared first in the recently established newspaper *al-Fajr al-jadid* (1972), spelled out al-Qadhafi’s pseudo-utopian vision of the world. Claiming that the true Islam of the Prophet had been corrupted by historical errors and accretions, he rejected all existing notions of legitimacy and loyalty in the Islamic and Arab worlds. This included amending the Islamic calendar to begin at the time of the Prophet’s death in 632 (opposed to the traditional date of the *hijra* in 622); rejecting the Hadith as corrupt texts; and stripping the ulama, once supporters of the coup against the Sanussi establishment, of all privileged posts and income. Al-Qadhafi claimed his “Third International Theory” would create a stateless society “based on religion and nationalism - any religion, any nationalism.” He pledged funds and arms in support of revolutionary groups around the world (including the Irish Republican Army and the African National Congress) and printed new currency adorned with his likeness and the name of his new state. He adopted as the symbol of the nation a plain green flag to complement the new constitution based on his book. And on 2 March 1977, he announced the creation of a new political entity based on the teachings of *The Green Book: “The People’s General Conference”*, which aimed to assemble people annually based on profession and as nominated by local committees from across the country. Al-Qadhafi also officially adopted at this time the title “Leader of the Revolution” (*al-Qa‘id al-Thawra*) which he would retain until his death in 2011.

In sharp contrast, Hifter appears motivated by little if any ideological conviction beyond the tactical aims of his 14 February declaration. Feras Kilani, a reporter for BBC Arabic who has covered the conflict in Libya extensively pressed the Liwa’ on this point during an extensive interview in January 2015. His “mandate”, Hifter said, was “to evacuate Benghazi of terrorist groups” including Ansar al-

---

Shari‘ah in Libya (ASL)\textsuperscript{23} and the Islamic State. “When the operation in Benghazi began”, he noted, “there were 7,000 ASL supporters. ISIS was second.” Misrata, he claimed, was the point of origin for most of the jihadist fighters “including those with funding from Turkey and Qatar.” Hifter also told Ferani that Benghazi was threatened by groups from the South: “Mali, Niger and the Sahara”. And that the need to “close the southern gate”, as he explained, left open the possibility of further expansion.\textsuperscript{24}

Mobilisation of the LNA beyond Benghazi began in the fall of 2018, when Hifter’s forces besieged the city of Derna which had effectively been under the control of ISIS since 2014. From there they moved to the South and the region of Fezzan, where the Islamic State also laid claim to territory. As the Libyan observer and retired Royal Airman John Oakes observed in his blog, “Berenice Stories”, Hifter’s position in the South allowed his forces to move towards Tripoli by way of “the old trade route from Sebha in the Fezzan to Gharian in the Jebel Nefusa”, thereby bypassing Misrata forces along the coastal route.\textsuperscript{25} The Fezzan expedition, while undoubtedly aimed at securing points of entry, also allowed Hifter to amass forces within striking distance of the capital without alerting Tripoli or the international community to the pending assault.

Discourse surrounding Hifter’s Operation Dignity regularly devolved into tactical blow-by-blow or cursory descriptions of his enemies and friends. Witness France’s Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian from a 2019 interview with Le Figaro:

“Since May 2014, LNA, led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, conducted one military operation after another and successfully hunted ISIS and other terrorist groups from one city to the next. LNA first defeated the so-called Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, a militia alliance which included the group responsible for the attack that killed the U.S. ambassador, after two-month long battle in Benghazi. In October 2014, the terrorist group ISIS took control of numerous government buildings, security vehicles and local landmarks in Derna. LNA launched a military operation in 2015 which successfully liberated the city from ISIS, Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups.”

“LNA forces and local police began to impose security in previously lawless cities one by one until finally dominating all of Cyrenaica and securing the country’s vital oil resources. Earlier this year, LNA mobilized its forces towards the southern region of Fezzan in response to calls made by residents who suffered from the criminal acts of local militias and Chadian armed rebel groups. The residents of Fezzan quickly embraced LNA, which enabled its forces to take control of the region in less than three months.”

“LNA continues its territorial expansion with its recent operation to liberate Tripoli. In addition to France, other international powers such as the United States, Russia and China have signaled their support for LNA’s operation.”\textsuperscript{26}

Such public discourse was in essence obsequious, in part because most knowledge of Hifter’s movement has been shaped by his own rhetorical posture. In al-Liwa’s words: his ideology is his mandate. And his mandate is to eliminate terrorism. Al-Liwa represents the absence of ideology. He is the concept of “counter” incarnate, or more

\textsuperscript{23} A.S.L. emerged following an internal dispute among members of the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade—a military organisation formed to battle al-Qadhafi’s forces in Benghazi. Hifter’s announcement of Operation Dignity singled out Muhammad.


\textsuperscript{26} Quoted in \textit{ibid}. 

~ 119 ~
The Gates of Tripoli: Power and propaganda in post-revolutionary Libya

precisely, Countering Violent Extremism, as the policy of fighting terrorism became known in Washington. In the current conflict it appears ironic on the surface that the Arab press routinely describe his tactics as violent and extreme, not because that is untrue or because it frames him in the same light he seeks to diminish, but because his actions are not simply tactical. For want of any information suggesting otherwise his violent posture is strategic. It is his mandate and his philosophical raison d’être.

The Pragmatics of Power

The public face of Hifter’s ideology, for lack of a better term, has been fashioned to appear pragmatic insofar as his “mandate” to stabilise the country is predicated on the existence of a country in “chaos”. Unverified references within Arab media to a book he was believed to have published while in the United States titled Ruʾiya siyasiyya l-misar al-taghirr bi-il-quwa (A Political Vision for the Path of Change by Force), along with speculation about his connection to the CIA or other vested parties had the potential of inverting his pragmatic façade. But for the most part even his detractors have tended to reinforce the Liwa’s self-styled identity by criticising his campaign within the parameters of its own design. “The rebel who opposes state institutions and who said he arrived in a country overrun with chaos, murder, torture and displacement has been unable to take any steps to end the daily suffering of average citizens”, exclaimed the Attorney General of the GNA, Abdul Hakim Belhadj.27 Belhadj’s comments in-and-of themselves represented a remarkable twist of fate. A reformed leader of the once al-Qaeda aligned Libyan Fighting Group (al-Jama’a al-Libiyah al-muqatala), the fact that Belhadj was now in a position to rail against the audaciousness of a “rebel warlord” from the provinces illustrated how deep the transformation of power in Tripoli had been. But such comments also reinforced the remarkable dexterity of Hifter’s communicative front. His competency was perceived in relation to the belligerence of the enemy; his leadership in contrast to the multiplicity of antagonistic forces poised against him.

In certain respects Hifter’s rise echoed what Tunisian commentator Youssef Seddik described as the “magical introduction of the word ‘technocrat’” onto the post-Arab Spring landscape.28 The “technocrats” he observed of several political appointments made by an ostensibly conciliatory Islamist government in Tunisia were to be the catalyst for an “artificial catharsis”.

“By its evocation of ‘technique’, the word ‘technocrat’ had the philological merit of announcing to the ear and understanding of your average Joe (M. Tout-le-monde) an idea and a word so familiar that it seemed almost to be a part of our own dialect, or even classical Arabic when one thinks of the word ‘teqnī’ surreptitiously tucked into the lexicon of certain tracts of literature. It was in this way that M. Ghannouchi was able to demonstrate his flair for populism …. As he said on the radio one day, during a particularly inspired moment, he would resolve the false dilemma of politics and party by assembling an apolitical party. A party of technocrats!”29

29 Ibid.
The illusion of the apolitical, pragmatic leader gained currency as being distinct from the nationalists and the Islamists in particular who had dominated the voting booth. “They are politicians, yes, but they are professionals as well. They’re technocrats,” Seddik wrote sardonically. The problem is that “techno is just the first part of the word ‘technocrat’. The second part means ‘power’. And not just any doctor becomes a political boss unless he is named Hippocrates. Because this famous doctor does always hold power, albeit strictly over horses.”

The technocratic, or pragmatic visage of Hifter’s post-revolutionary narrative of securitisation belied the underbelly of his campaign. Technocracy is still a kind of power but it is one that defines itself by a tactical relationship with that which it suppresses. The communications apparatus surrounding his movement maximised this dynamic: “No to the Brotherhood, no to Dua’ish, yes to the Libyan Army and its leader Marshall Khalifa Hifter may God protect him” read the byline to LNA’s minuscule ‘About’ page on their Facebook site.

Figure 2: LNA Facebook Page

Sympathisers within the greater communications sphere of the pro-Hifter camp regularly contributed to this narrative identity. The dynamic became particularly stark amid the outset of the Tripoli expedition.

In early May 2019, Al-Arabiya, the principal organ for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) ran a report about recent video footage purporting to show an Iranian weapons shipment arriving at the port of Misrata. This was followed by a report on 21 May that “Turkish ships … carrying large numbers of terrorists, including among them supporters (ansar) of Da’ish” were disembarking at the port of Tripoli. And on

---

30 Ibid.
31 May, citing an article in *Jeune Afrique, Al-Arabiya* ran a headline story stipulating that the leader of ISIS—Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi—may have sought refuge in Libya.33

RT Arabic, meanwhile, another staunch supporter of Hifter’s campaign, aired reports like the one on 30 April in which a London-based “expert” rehashes Hifter’s law and order narrative within a split screen showing, firstly, scenes of an LNA military parade (also featured on the LNA’s Facebook page) and then an apparent terrorist assault on an unnamed government compound. The former is orderly, decisive and carefully choreographed. The latter is chaotic. These kinds of communicative aesthetics smartly reinforced the pragmatic and technocratic dimensions of Hifter’s movement,34 but they were also in essence “permutative” (to quote Philippe-Joseph

---


Salazar), that is: automatically tied to, and ironically reliant upon, the very material they sought to supplant.³⁵

The permutative or derivative quality of the LNA’s aesthetic was even more apparent in the group’s own propaganda, including the dramatic two-minute film released via social media on 5 April 2019. Tactfully released after the LNA’s successful establishment of a forward operating base just south of Tripoli, the two-and-a-half-minute video “Al-Fath al-Mubin” was ostensibly created as the principal piece of propaganda surrounding the Liwa’s imminent invasion of the capital. Named in homage to the campaign of ’Amr ibn al-‘As, the seventh century general who led an effort to ‘open’ the Maghreb after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 641 CE, the phrase ‘Al-Fath al-Mubin’ carried broad cultural currency in part because of its association with a popular Egyptian musalsala or telenovela of the same name from the early 2000s. Invocation of the story of the sahab or companion of the Prophet, Ibn al-‘As, also appeared calibrated to rally the significant faction of Salafist fighters enlisted in Hifter’s campaign. The LNA’s vying for the attention of this critical population may also have directed the ostensibly strategic use of the army’s ISIS-style cinematography.

Al-Fath al-mubin, which features a massive convoy of heavily mounted pick-up trucks streaming down a highway, resembled scenes from ISIS videos like the 2015 release Ghazwat Abu Ibrahim al-Masrati which documented the invasion of Sirte by various ISIS aligned militias in the spring of 2015. The original scene, most likely produced by Al-Furqan Media Foundation (the principal filmmaking unit of the Islamic State) and disseminated under the Wilayat Tarabalus (State of Tripoli) banner, became an ubiquitous part of ISIS’s Libyan messaging strategy, which, beginning with the horrific filming of twenty-one Egyptian men simultaneously executed on the shores of Sirte, frequently invoked a sense of imminent arrival and holy war.

Employing a similar arsenal of aerial-drone footage, stop-motion photography and graphic design software, the Fath al-mubin video was part of a broad effort on the part of the LNA and its “War Information Division” (Sh’abat al-‘ilam al-harbi) to imitate and presumably counter the aesthetic appeal of ISIS communications. This included stylised battle scenes in the tradition of ISIS’s ghazwa or military expedition genre, homages to fallen “martyrs”, and video exposés of “treacherous” enemies. The LNA’s War Information Division even employed mythico-aesthetic tropes similar to those invoked by ISIS and other Salafi-jihadist organisations such as the image of the lion and audio-cuts of drawn swords.

---

36 Risalat muq’a b-il-dima’ ila ama al-salib (A message signed with blood to the nation of the cross, 2016).
Concurrent with the dissemination of the *al-Fath al-mubin* promotional video, various armed militias in and around Tripoli took to the Internet to declare their allegiance to
The Gates of Tripoli: Power and propaganda in post-revolutionary Libya

Hifter (Figure 10). While it was difficult to verify the timing and authenticity of such postings, the combined effect of the media assault was one of coordination and convergence—a veritable mirror of ISIS communications strategy from the sacking of Mosul to the siege of Derna.

But while the War Information Division of the LNA was able to mimic certain aesthetic tropes of ISIS communications, the narrative identity of the campaign diverged significantly from that of the jihadists.

Beginning with films like Ghazwat Abu Ibrahim al-Masrati (The Battle of Abu Ibrahim al-Masrati 2015) and continuing through Al-Furqan’s most extensive Libyan production Mawqaf al-mut (The point of death, 2018), ISIS’s messaging strategy in Libya has closely tracked the historical formula of al-Qaeda’s narrative which posits the jihad as a struggle against Western imperialism, including oil exploitation, local corruption and fraternal deceit.

Figure 10: Pro-Hifter Militia, YouTube.com, 5 April 2019

Figure 11: Donald J. Trump in the Wilayat Barqah production (Mawqaf al-Mut). The quote reads: “I do want to go into Libya but only if we can get the gas.” Al-Furqan Media / Wilayat Barqah, “Mawqaf al-Mut”, Vimeo.com, 2018
Distinct from earlier al-Qaeda exemplars and in line with the aesthetics of ISIS propaganda writ large, al-Furqan’s media units in Libya (Wilayat Tarabalus, Wilayat Barqah and Wilayat Fezzan) have inflected their propaganda with expressly localised rhetorical references as well as highly choreographed live-action sequences.38 The group also employs various tropes from Islamic history in the form of Quranic inscriptions, anashid (chants) and other aesthetic devices, but these elements are secondary to its underlying narrative.

In this regard it could be said the LNA’s counter-aesthetic runs just surface deep. The disparity becomes particularly pronounced surrounding the topic of oil. ISIS depicts Libyan oil-fields as a scene of imperial exploitation and has documented numerous attempts to sabotage the country’s oil production. The LNA in contrast depicts oil-field battle scenes as a struggle for stabilisation, which becomes a key point of contention in the overall narrative identity of Operation Dignity and al-Fath al-Mubin. ISIS is not unaware of the rhetorical weight behind such securitisation narratives. And indeed some of its own propaganda—such as the 2016 video al-Shurta al-Islamiyya bi-al-Medinat Sirt (The Islamic Police of Sirte) which depicts ISIS fighters conducting traffic stops and holding police training exercises, could be considered derivative.

Relentless discourse on the prospect of “chaos” (fauda), propagated chiefly by Hifter’s camp and magnified through major media outlets like RT (Russian), Al-Arabiya (Saudi) and Youm 7 (Egyptian), as well as local networks like Libya al-Ahrar,39 created,

38 For more on al-Furqan media and the genealogy of its aesthetic prerogatives during the reign of al-Baghdadi see Nathaniel Greenberg, “Islamic State War Documentaries”, The International Journal of Communication, forthcoming.
39 For more on the role of local media and its public perception, see Naji Abou-Khalil and Laurence Hargreaves, “Libyan Television and its Influence on the Security Sector”, United States Institute of Peace,
ironically, an opening for hard-line militias including ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia in Libya to present their own counternarrative to the forces of destabilisation.

This dynamic was not new of course. As I have written elsewhere, the paradoxical populism of Ansar al-Sharia was predicated ultimately on the perception of disorder, despite the group’s own role in propagating the dissolution of state-led authority by way of extra-official policing and illicit trade.40 (The name Ansar al-Shari’i’ah means literally “Partisans of the Law”). Hifter’s relative distance from the ideological debates engulfing post-revolutionary Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain or Morocco (from constitutional reform, to laïcité or women’s rights), did little to stem his inherent association with the perception of lawlessness or the more insidious label of “al-taghut” — the “false God of power”.41 So it is worth noting finally the most profound critique of Hifter has flowed not through the UN or oppositional news outlets like Al-Jazeera or BBC, but al-Tinahisa, the small but mighty Salafist news organisation built around the authority of Sheikh Saddik al-Ghariani, Libya’s Grand Mufti and head of the Office of Fatwas (Dar al-Ifta). Al-Ghariani who at times has defended but also urged Ansar al-Sharia to recognise the Islamist-led government in Tripoli,42 has been unequivocal in his condemnation of Hifter. As he proclaimed bluntly in his discourse from 10 April 2019: “Hifter with his Zionist project kills for the sake of the devil” (“yuqatalu fi sabil al-Shaytan”).43 His condemnation of the Liwa’ stems not simply from the perception promulgated by Al-Jazeera and others that Hifter is doing the bidding of hostile outsiders, but that he is acting beyond the shores of the collective will. The “legal duty” (al-wajab al-shari’i) of every Libyan, he exclaimed in abstract terms, was to “speak with one voice”.44 The Liwa’ represented a source of division. His campaign to secure the country was in fact pulling it apart.

However polished the Liwa’s operational message appeared, the absence of any ideological response to the message of stabilisation as presented by the Islamists has continued to expose his strongman ethos to passionate resistance. Witnessed by the messaging strategies of Islamists and nationalists alike, however, the discourse of securitisation remains a dominant paradigm in Libya as it has across much of the post-Arab Spring world. Defining the antagonists in such a struggle and in turn defending the campaign of one hostile group over another remains up for grabs. The revolution, as it were, continues.

~ Department of Modern and Classical Languages, George Mason University, USA ~


41 The leader of ASL Muhammad al-Zahawi regularly described Hifter with reference to the term ‘taghut’ which also became a kind of ideological loadstar among jihadist fighters of Algeria’s long Civil War. See: https://tinyurl.com/y4s2fwx4 [Accessed 16 October 2019].

