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The Telegraph

Libya: the West and al-Qaeda on the same side

By Richard Spencer

18 Mar 2011

[WikiLeaks](#) cables, independent analysts and reporters have all identified supporters of Islamist causes among the opposition to Col Gaddafi's regime, particularly in the towns of Benghazi and Derna.

An al-Qaeda leader of [Libyan](#) origin, Abu Yahya al-Libi, released a statement backing the insurrection a week ago, while Yusuf Qaradawi, the Qatar-based, Muslim Brotherhood-linked theologian issued a fatwa authorising Col Gaddafi's military entourage to assassinate him.

But they also agree that the leading roles in the revolution are played by a similar cross-section of society as that in [Egypt](#) next door – liberals, nationalists, those with personal experience of regime brutality and Islamists who subscribe to democratic principles.

The WikiLeaks cables, initially revealed by The Daily Telegraph and dating from 2008, identified Derna in particular as a breeding ground for fighters in a number of causes, including [Afghanistan](#) and [Iraq](#).

"The unemployed, disfranchised young men of eastern Libya have nothing to lose and are therefore willing to sacrifice themselves for something greater than themselves by engaging in

Col Gaddafi has pinpointed the rebels in Derna as being led by an [al-Qaeda](#) cell that has declared the town an Islamic emirate. The regime also casts blame on hundreds of members of the Libyan Islamist Fighting Group released since the group renounced violence two years ago.

Although said by the regime to be affiliated to al-Qaeda, most LIFG members have focused only on promoting sharia law in Libya, rejecting a worldwide "jihad".

The man running Derna's defences, Abdelkarim al-Hasadi, was arrested by US forces in Afghanistan in 2002, but says he does not support a Taliban-like state.

The rebels' political leadership there says it is secular.

The same goes for the wider leadership, whose membership claims to espouse largely liberal ideals.

In any future negotiations – should it come to dialogue or even victory – rebel spokesmen are likely to be politicians who were until recently senior figures in the regime itself.

The head of the opposition National Council, Mustafa Abdul Jalil was Col Gaddafi's justice minister until he defected at the start of the uprising.

That may not be as bad as it sounds – he was a law professor appointed to improve Libya's human rights record by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi when the colonel's son was leading Libya's westernisation drive, and had already clashed with longer-standing regime insiders.

The military chief, though, is Abdul Fattah Younis al-Obeidi, a former leader of Col Gaddafi's special forces who was his public security, or interior, minister until he went over to the rebels.

He has described Col Gaddafi as "not completely sane", and worked with the SAS during the now curtailed thaw in British-Libyan relations. But it is still ironic that the West is taking sides in a battle between the leader of a much hated regime and his former effective deputy.