Has the Muslim Brotherhood Allowed Turkey to Expand its Foothold in Libya?

It is common knowledge that in recent years, Libya has become a camp of sorts where units of practically all leading terrorist organizations are stationed. And each of them wants its share of influence in this country.

One of the key destabilizing elements is the presence of members of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (a terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation), who regularly stage provocative acts thus disrupting the fragile balance in certain parts of the nation. On May 14, 2019, the Libyan parliament designated the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist movement, as a terrorist organization. Nonetheless, units affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, having seemingly taken into account the mistakes made by the Islamic opposition in Egypt during their repeated attempts to seize power over the course of their lengthy struggle against the secular government (which lasted from the second half of the XX century to the start of the XXI century), chose to become even more active in this North African country.

The Muslim Brotherhood is believed to have gained influence in the Libyan GNA (Government of National Accord). And in the author’s opinion, the GNA has been trying to tighten its grip on power with the help of this Islamist movement in order to gain full control over the North African nation. It is no secret that despite opposition from other political movements, the GNA, headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, allowed Turkey to deploy its forces in Libya; signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) “to strengthen decentralization and sub-national governance” with the UK’s government, and gained recognition by NATO and de facto the United States whose leadership has been seemingly taking advantage of the presence of Turkish troops in the nation. It is thus not surprising that members of the Muslim Brotherhood have been deliberately destabilizing the situation in the country in order to give mercenaries from Turkey more time to strengthen their positions in the region with blessings from some Western nations.
However, units affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement are far from unified, and conflicts among them have become more frequent. In July there have been armed confrontations between militias around Ajilat, located 80 km west of the capital, Tripoli. According to a report published by the Federal News Agency (RIA FNA), these clashes involving heavy weapons were over territorial disputes. The government in Tripoli is extremely concerned with the conflict which not only stands in the way of the peace process in the country but also threatens the security of the entire Western region. Officials from the Libyan National Army (LNA) have repeatedly spoken about the danger posed by armed groups supported by the Muslim Brotherhood in the country’s western part in particular and the region as a whole, and have also called for its dissolution and disarmament.

In an attempt to throw the interim roadmap of the Libyan Political Dialogue off schedule and delay the Libyan general election scheduled for later this year, the Muslim Brotherhood (banned in Russia) resorted to its latest trick by insisting that it is necessary to adopt a new constitution or hold a referendum on it. This step is clearly aimed at not allowing the parties to reach a consensus regarding the constitutional basis, which the December 24, 2021 general election could rely on. By prompting the people to vote for some interim constitution they can disrupt the election process, especially if the draft constitution is not approved by Libyans. And a number of political observers believe that such a turn of events will benefit the Muslim Brotherhood.

Libya’s Justice and Construction Party (JCP), associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, was officially founded in March 2012. The JCP proved to be a worthy contender after competing in the Libyan parliamentary election in June 2011 after the so-called Arab Spring, and placing second behind the National Forces Alliance, headed by Mahmoud Jibril. Later on, during the Libyan General National Congress, members of the organization headed a coup and won the majority of independent seats. In 2014, Islamists and Misratan militias launched Operation Libya Dawn. The country was left divided as a result, while the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya has established closer ties with certain organizations not only in Turkey but also Egypt, Morocco and Algeria in order to unify these groups in the region.

On May 12, 2021, RIA FNA reported, citing SkyNewsArabia, that the Muslim Brotherhood (an organization banned in the Russian Federation) was planning on wreaking havoc in Libya yet again by ensuring, via any means necessary, their supporter was appointed to the post of Minister of Defense. A number of political scientists think that the Islamists’ push to have their member vie for this role is in fact yet another attempt to throw the political landscape in Libya into disarray, as well as to undermine the national dialogue and the work being done by the 5+5 Joint Military Commission to disband armed groups and to force foreign mercenaries to leave the North African nation. Libyan political analyst Ibrahim al-Fitouri told Sky News Arabia that the Muslim Brotherhood had not adhered “to its declared principles”, and had instead been “using its platform for political work and violating laws and regulations”. Citing another Libyan observer, Osman Baraka, the May report in RIA FNA stated that in order for the Muslim Brotherhood not to become the most influential organization in the country, it was essential to “disarm” it by ridding Libya of mercenaries and armed militants, and by preventing conflicts and the resulting chaos among warring Libyan sides.

In the meantime, during the extraordinary general conference staged by the Justice and Construction Party, the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood (an organization banned in the Russian Federation), Imad Al-Banani was elected as the JCP new head. Changes to the party’s policies and vision in the next stage were also discussed.

According to a June 20 article in Al Ain News, Imad Abdel Latif al-Banani “is one of the most dangerous leaders of the Brotherhood in Libya”. He was one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in the eastern city of Benghazi, and “was previously arrested several times during the rule of” Muammar Gaddafi. Imad Al-Banani belongs to the hawks of the movement in Libya, “who reject a political solution to the crisis”.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s growing foothold in Libya seemingly benefits Turkey and its neo-Ottoman aims, as well as US interests. In November 2020, political analyst Mohammed Al-Amani stated that the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, held in Tunisia, had been organized in a hasty fashion thus risking collapse of negotiations, which would be to the advantage of Muslim Brotherhood members. Serious accusations were also leveled by him at Stephanie Williams, the deputy head of UNSMIL (United Nations Support Mission in Libya) from the United States. Allegedly, her personal ambitions were at stake as she had so far been unable to produce significant results. Hence an exciting initiative with broad media coverage, however superficially organized, could have helped her career. The analyst also accused Stephanie Williams of trying to impose a pro-American government in Libya.

At the end of May, 2021, US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland said in an interview that it was “not correct to say that the withdrawal of foreign powers” was a precondition for an election, scheduled for December 24, 2021. He also called Turkey an important partner in the Libyan political process and hinted that Ankara could benefit from
consolidating its efforts with Washington, clearly showing that the White House supports the idea that all foreign forces should withdraw from Libya, other than Turkey’s.

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