Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

Name: Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

Type of Organization:
- Insurgent
- non-state actor
- religious
- social services provider
- terrorist
- violent

Ideologies and Affiliations:
- Islamist
- jihadist
- Qutbist
- Salafist
- Sunni
- takfiri

Place of Origin:
Libya

Year of Origin:
2012

Founder(s):

Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu (founder of Ansar al-Sharia in Derna); Mohamed al-Zahawi, Nasser al-Tarshani, and other Libyan Islamists (founders of Ansar al-Sharia Benghazi)

Places of Operation:

Libya

Overview
Executive Summary:

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) was a violent Salafist group that was active in Libya from 2012 to 2017. The group sought to transform Libya into an Islamic state governed in accordance with sharia (Islamic law). At its height, ASL operated branches in Benghazi, Derna, Sirte, Ajdabiya, and Nawfalia.[1]

ASL emerged from two smaller groups: the Ansar al-Sharia Brigade in Benghazi (ASB) and Ansar al-Sharia in Derna (ASD). ASB and ASD began operating under the name of "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya" in an effort to rehabilitate their public image after facing domestic and international condemnation for their alleged involvement in the September 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.[2]   ASL denied that it was connected to the consulate attack and, in an effort to rebrand, increased its focus on *dawa* (Islamic missionary work). Through the group's *dawa* campaign—which included fixing schools and roads, opening medical clinics, and providing food for the hungry—ASL was able to win back the trust of many Libyans and to exert control in regions that had been long-neglected under former dictator Muammar Gaddafi.[3]

ASL's connection to al-Qaeda central and to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has been recognized by local and international authorities. According to the United Nations, ASL operated training camps in Libya "mainly for the benefit of Al-Qaida associated groups in Syria and in Iraq."[4] Although ASL denied any official connection, the group's former emir Mohamed al-Zahawi openly praised al-Qaeda in a 2012 BBC interview.[5]

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

On May 16, 2014, a retired Libyan army general named Khalifa Haftar launched a massive assault—codenamed "Operation Dignity"—on Islamist groups in Benghazi.[6]   Although ASL initially maintained control of Benghazi, civilian uprisings within the city and offensives launched by Haftar gradually eroded ASL's control. Further, ASL suffered from the defection of a number of prominent ASL members to ISIS, including ASD founder Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu and ASL's senior sharia official Abu Abdullah al-Libi.[7]   Lydia Sizer at the Middle East Institute noted that the number of ASL members defecting to ISIS appeared to increase after the death of Mohamed al-Zahawi in January 2015.[8]

Haftar's Benghazi offensive ultimately led to the dissolution of ASL on May 28, 2017. ASL announced that, after being pushed back to its last two neighborhoods in the city, the group had lost too many fighters and leaders to continue functioning.[9]

Doctrine:

Sharia

ASL's primary objective was to institute sharia in Libya. As the group's former leader, Mohamed al-Zahawi, said, "Our brave youths will continue their struggle until they impose [sharia]."[10]   Like Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia, ASL viewed democracy as the antithesis to Islam. The group believed democracy subverted sharia by giving man the power to make law—a power ASL considered to be reserved for God alone. This belief separated ASL from the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Construction Party, and other Islamist groups that sought to introduce Islamic principles in Libya through the democratic process.[11]

Dawa and Jihad

ASL viewed garnering public support through *dawa* as a necessary precursor to the establishment of an Islamic state in Libya.[12]   In the absence of a strong local government, ASL's *dawa* activities became integral to daily life in Benghazi.[13]   The group usurped the government's role in providing a number of key social services, including cleaning, maintaining, and patrolling streets, collecting garbage, and establishing medical clinics and hospitals.[14]   Many of ASL's *dawa* activities were designed to promote Islam. ASL ran Quranic competitions, provided food to the poor during the Muslim holidays of Eid and Ramadan, confiscated drugs and alcohol, and opened religious schools and centers. In media campaigns, ASL highlighted its outreach and charity efforts, portraying themselves as defenders and promoters of Islam and sharia.[15]

Aaron Y. Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, wrote that ASL likely emerged from the ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, who "has attempted to steer the jihadi community to a more 'pure' jihad" in order to offset the brutal image of jihad popularized by deceased al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.[16]   According to Zelin, al-Maqdisi tried to draw a distinction between the idea of *qital al-nikayya* (fighting to hurt or damage the enemy) and *qital al-tamkin* (fighting to consolidate one's power). Zelin writes that "the former provides only short-term tactical victories… whereas the latter provides a framework for consolidating an Islamic state." According to Zelin, ASL's practices appeared to be in accord with *qital al-tamkin*.[17]

Hisba

ASL routinely used violence as a means to enforce sharia in Libya under the banner of *hisba,* the duty to command moral acts and to prohibit immoral ones.[18]   According to al-Zahawi, it was "a religious duty" to destroy and remove Sufi shrines that the group considered idolatry. He went on to explain: "people worship the deceased and this is prohibited. It is not me who says so but rather our religion." ASL's *hisba* activities also included confiscating anatomy books from the European School in Benghazi after deeming that they were "pornographic" in nature.[19] Similarly, in February 2015, gunmen from an "al-Qaeda inspired militia" seized radio and television stations in Sirte after ASL "warned the station to stop broadcasting music."[20]

Organizational Structure:

ASL emerged from two smaller groups formed in the aftermath of the 2011 Libyan Revolution: the Ansar al-Sharia Brigade in Benghazi (ASB), founded by Mohamed al-Zahawi, and Ansar al-Sharia in Derna (ASD), established by Abu Sufian Bin Qumu.[21]   ASB and ASD initially operated independently, exerting control in Benghazi and Derna, respectively.[22]   The groups were reportedly drawn together after both faced domestic and international condemnation for their alleged involvement in the September 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi that killed four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens.[23]   After the attack, al-Zahawi took steps to rebrand ASB. The group ramped up its *dawa* campaign and began to operate under the name of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya to convey its support for Islamic unity across the

nation.[24]   Media reports claimed that ASD had disbanded after the attack, however, Bin Qumu and other ASD members eventually re-surfaced in Derna as a semi-autonomous branch of ASL.[25]   ASL eventually established additional branches in Sirte, Ajdabiya, and Nawfalia and reportedly had a presence in al-Bayda, Sabratha, and Tripoli.[26]

Mohamed al-Zahawi served as ASL's emir until January 2015, when he died from wounds sustained in an October 2014 airstrike.[27]   Six months later, on June 18, 2015, the group named Abu Khalid al-Madani as its new leader.[28]   Little is known about ASL's organizational structure but the group reportedly had two main divisions: one dedicated to military affairs and one to philanthropy. ASL also operated a media apparatus called al-Raya Media Productions.[29]

ASL joined forces with other Islamist factions after General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army launched "Operation Dignity" in May 2014. [30]   ASL, the 17 February Martyrs Brigade, and other Islamist militias in Benghazi formed a coalition called the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council (BRSC) on June 20, 2014.[31]   In December 2014, ASL's branch in Derna and other Islamist militias in the region founded the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC), which was later renamed the Derna Protection Force (DPF).[32]   In the summer of 2016, ASL and the BRSC aligned with the umbrella organization Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) in the fight against Haftar's forces.[33]   After enduring three years of debilitating losses of fighters and leaders, ASL officially disbanded on May 28, 2017.[34]   A month later, on June 23, 2017, the BDB announced its plans to disband.[35]   In Derna it appears that the DPF continues to fight against the LNA, with reports of clashes in the region in October 2018.[36]

Financing:

Ansar al-Sharia militiamen reportedly received funding from the Libyan government to help clamp down on drug dealers and crime in Benghazi. Sources in Libya's Parliament allegedly revealed that these payments were made via the 17 February Martyrs Brigade and other militias in the region. According to a February 2013 Daily Beast report, the former chief of staff for Libya's ground forces, Yousef Mangoush, had "divert[ed] operational funds from the fledgling armed forces to the militia."[37]

ASL also reportedly received donations from Libyan expatriates for the social services that it provided.[38]

Recruitment and Training:

Recruitment

ASL operated a highly professional and organized media wing called al-Raya Media Productions Foundation and, like many other jihadist organizations, maintained an active social media presence.[39]   ASL utilized a number of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus to attract new recruits.[40]   On Twitter the group operated a series of accounts to create a "'correspondents' or 'reporters' network" to disseminate ASL propaganda, similar to that used by the Nusra Front (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham). ASL propaganda on Twitter included photos of ASL's civil and social services in Benghazi and information from the fight against Libyan forces. The group also used its Twitter accounts to praise its late leader Mohamed al-Zahawi's commitment to jihad and to circulate audio clips from 96.9 FM, a radio station that the group broadcasted in Benghazi. [41]   Twitter banned ASL's accounts, but the group quickly replaced them. In a new strategy, ASL launched several new feeds at once in late March 2015.[42]

Training

According to the United Nations, Ansar al-Sharia in Derna maintained "several terrorist training camps" in the region "mainly for the benefit of Al-Qaida associated groups in Syria and in Iraq."[43]   On April 6, 2016, Ansar al-Sharia in Derna released a video showing the graduation of a small group of fighters from its Martyr Milud Sadaqa training camp, where the men trained with small arms and light machine guns and learned basic infantry movements.[44]   There is also evidence to suggest that ASL operated training camps in Benghazi.[45]   Half of the 24 militants involved in the January 2013 In Amenas, Algeria, gas complex attack had reportedly trained in ASL camps in Benghazi.[46]

Also Known As:

- Ansar al-Charia in Libya[47]
- Katibat Ansar al-Charia[48]

COUNTER
EXTREMISM
PROJECT

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

- Katibat Ansar al-Sharia[49]
- Partisans of Islamic Law in Libya[50]
- Partisans of Sharia in Libya[51]
- Supporters of Islamic Law in Libya[52]
- Supporters of Sharia in Libya[53]

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Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

Key Leaders

Abu Khalid al-Madani

Leader of ASL

Mohamed al-Zahawi

Former leader of ASL (deceased)

Abu Tamim al-Libi

Senior sharia jurist

Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu

Leader of the Ansar al-Sharia branch in Derna (defected to ISIS)

Nasser al-Tarshani

Head of ASL religious committee (allegedly deceased)

Hani al-Mansuri

Spokesman

Wissam Bin Hamid

Military commander in the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council (decased)

Mansour al-Shalili

Military commander of ASL (deceased)

Abu Abdullah al-Libi

Former senior sharia official
(defected to ISIS)

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

History:

- Reports of clashes between the Libyan National Army and the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna city.
  Source: Amira El-Fekki, "Egypt's most wanted militant's arrest recounts fighting extremist groups in Derna," Daily News Egypt, October 14, 2018, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2018/10/14/egypts-most-wanted-militants-arrest-recounts-fighting-extremist-groups-in-derna/.

- **April 23, 2018:** Reports of clashes between the Libyan National Army and the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council near Wadi al-Arqub west of Derna.
  Source: "Other Jihadi Actors," Eyes on ISIS in Libya, May 1, 2018, http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/other-jihadi-actors/25-apr-1-may-ansar-al-sharia-members-allegedly-involved-in-clashes-near-derna/.

- **June 23, 2017:** BDB announces its plans to disband.
  Source: "Benghazi Defense Brigades say they are ready to disband group," Libya Observer, June 23, 2017, https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/benghazi-defense-brigades-say-they-are-ready-disband-group.

- **May 28, 2017:** ASL announces its dissolution after enduring heavy losses in Benghazi.
  Source: "Libya's Ansar al-Sharia announces dissolution," Al Jazeera, May 28, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/libya-ansar-al-sharia-announces-dissolution-170528045219409.html.

- **March 18, 2017:** The Libyan National Army defeats ASL and its allies in the "12 blocks" area of southwest Benghazi.
  Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "East Libyan army takes rivals' final holdout in southwest Benghazi," Reuters, March 18, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/east-libyan-army-takes-rivals-final-holdout-in-southwest-benghazi-idUSKBN16P0LZ.

- In the seventh issue of the al-Qaeda newsletter al-Masra, AQIM leader Abu Abdul Ilah Ahmed states that Ansar al-Sharia and AQIM both seek to establish sharia in Libya.
  Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Libya's Terrorist Descent: Causes and Solutions," Long War Journal, September 27, 2017, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/libyas-terrorist-descent-causes-and-solutions.php.

- **January 26, 2017:** The Libyan National Army pushes ASL and its allies out of the Qanfouda District of Benghazi.
  Source: "Al-Qaeda-linked rebels 'defeated in Benghazi district,'" Al Jazeera, January 26, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/al-qaeda-linked-rebels-defeated-benghazi-district-170126074100867.html.

- **January 15, 2017:** The Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council shoots down a Libyan MiG-23 fighter jet over Benghazi.
  Source: Abdulkader Assad, "Benghazi Shura Council downs Dignity Operation warplane in Benghazi, pilot survives," Libyan Observer, January 15, 2017, https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/benghazi-shura-council-downs-dignity-operation-warplane-benghazi-pilot-survives.

- **November 18, 2016:** The Libyan National Army pushes ASL and its allies out of the Qawarsha sector of Benghazi.
  Source: "Haftar forces claim 'great victory' in Libya's Benghazi," Al-Araby, November 18, 2016, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/11/18/haftar-forces-claim-great-victory-in-libyas-benghazi.

- **July 21, 2016:** The Benghazi Revolutionaries's Shura Council releases a video purporting to show three of the 130 people abducted in 2014.
  In the video, the three men demand the Libyan National Army stop conducting air strikes in Benghazi. Source: "Libya: Lives of captives trapped under fire in Benghazi in danger," Amnesty International, July 21, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/libya-lives-of-captives-trapped-under-fire-in-benghazi-in-danger/.

- **July 17, 2016:** BDB takes credit for downing a helicopter over Benghazi and killing three French soldiers.
  The BDB subsequently threatens to turn Libya into a "graveyard for [France] as it was for your three soldiers." Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Presence of French special forces in Libya sets off controversy," Long War Journal, July 22, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/07/presence-of-french-special-forces-in-libya-sets-off-controversy.php.

- ASL and the BRSC align with the umbrella organization Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) in the fight against Haftar's forces.
  Source: Thomas Joscelyn. "Libya's Terrorist Descent: Causes and Solutions," Long War Journal, September 27, 2017, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/09/libyas-terrorist-descent-causes-and-solutions.php.

- **February 8, 2016:** ASL shoots down a Libyan MiG-23 fighter jet near the city of Derna.
  Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia claims to have downed jet flying over Derna, Libya," Long War Journal, February 8, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/ansar-al-sharia-claims-to-have-downed-jet-flying-over-derna-libya.php.

- **October 25, 2015:** ASL announces the death of its military commander, Mansour al-Shalili.
  AQIM releases a eulogy for al-Shalili four days later. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb honors Ansar al Sharia's slain military commander," *Long War Journal*, October 29, 2015, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/al-qaeda-in-the-islamic-maghreb-honors-ansar-al-sharias-slain-military-commander.php.

- **July 9, 2015 - July 11, 2015:** At least 19 people are killed in Benghazi during clashes between Libyan soldiers and Islamist militants from the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council.
  Source: Reuters, "At least 19 dead in Benghazi in the latest clashes between Libyan soldiers and Islamist fighters," *Business Insider*, June 11, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/r-latest-clashes-between-libyan-soldiers-islamists-in-benghazi-kill-19-medics-2015-7.

- **July 8, 2015:** The Tunisian government announces plans to build a 104-mile long wall along its border with Libya.
  Tunisian Prime Minister Habib Essid calls Libyan lawlessness "the biggest dilemma" facing Tunisia. Source: Ishaan Tharoor, "Tunisia plans to build a really long wall to keep out terrorists," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2015/07/08/tunisia-plans-to-build-a-really-long-wall-to-keep-out-terrorists/.

- **June 26, 2015:** A gunman armed with a Kalashnikov and grenades attacks mostly European tourists on a beach in Sousse, Tunisia, killing 38 people.
  The gunman is later identified as Seifeddine Rezgui. ISIS's Libyan branch claimed responsibility for the attack, but authorities believe ASL trained Rezgui.Sources: Elaine Ganley, "Terror on the beach: Tourists recount Tunisia attack horrors," Associated Press, June 27, 2015, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/6ac5b8ec60b94245ad9f29c8cbf39f72/terror-beach-tourists-recount-tunisia-attack-horrors; "World briefs: Iraqi militias vow to push Islamic State from Fallujah, site of tough US battle", *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 9, 2015, http://www.post-gazette.com/news/world/2015/07/09/World-briefs-Iraqi-militias-vow-to-push-Islamic-State-from-Fallujah-site-of-tough-US-battle/stories/201507090124.

- **June 24, 2015:** In a possible effort to chastise ISIS, ASL tweets, "What Do We Fight For?" with an image of an Islamic banner.
  ASL answers its own question with the following response: "[not] for this world nor for a certain position, glory, reputation, or admiration…we fight in defense of our religion, to establish the rule of God, and to follow the commands of our creator."Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

- **June 23, 2015:** Libyan newspaper Al Wasat reports that ASL and other jihadists, including militants from al-Qaeda, are fighting to push ISIS back from Derna.
  The paper also reports that two Libyan soldiers are killed in fighting with ASL outside of Derna. Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

- **June 22, 2015:** ASL posts images of its attack earlier that day on General Khalifa Haftar's barracks in Benghazi.
  ASL states its attack was initiated by a "remote-controlled" car bomb.Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

- **June 21, 2015:** ASL tweets a link to its weekly newsletter, *This Is Your Ummah, One Ummah*.
  The newsletter summarizes that activity of ASL and other jihadist groups.Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

- **June 18, 2015:** An ASL-related Twitter feed posts a link to the group's weekly radio broadcast, which announces that al-Madani has been named as Zawahi's successor.
  Al-Madani states on the show that his group and the global Muslim community would "not be able to cast off our humiliation unless we wage jihad." Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

- **June 16, 2015:** ASL releases a list of its men who were killed in the June 14 U.S. airstrike.
  Mokhtar Belmokhtar is not listed.Source: Ansar al-Shariah Libya, SITE Intelligence Group, accessed July 15, 2015, https://ent.siteintelgroup.com/index.php?option=com_customproperties&view=search&task=tag&tagId=603.

- **May 20, 2015:** Clashes erupt between Libyan armed forces and the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council. Nine Libyan soldiers are killed.
  Nine Libyan soldiers are killed.Source: Ahmed Elumami and Ayman al-Warfally, "Ten killed as Libya's rival governments take on Islamist fighters," Reuters, May 20, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/20/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0O51GO20150520.

- **May 13, 2015:** ASL claims responsibility for launching mortar rockets in Benghazi that kill four children.
  Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "Four children killed in rocket attack in Libya's Benghazi city: officials," Reuters, May 13, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/13/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0NY27A20150513.

- **May 7, 2015:** ASL directs rockets into a residential building in Benghazi, killing two civilians and wounding four others.
  Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "Two killed in rocket strike in Libya's Benghazi: medics," Reuters, May 7, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/07/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0NS1JD20150507.

- **April 11, 2015:** ASL and other Islamist groups clash with Libyan armed forces in Benghazi, leaving at least 10 dead.
  Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "Ten killed in new fighting in Libya's Benghazi – medics," Reuters, April 11, 2015, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/04/11/uk-libya-security-idUKKBN0N20LK20150411.

- **April 1, 2015:** Libya's contested Tripoli government votes to dismiss its prime minister, Omar al-Hassi, after he publicly praises ASL.
  Source: Borzou Daragahi, "Head of Libya's Islamist-backed government rejects dismissal," *Financial Times* (London), April 1, 2015, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/38cc4400-d861-11e4-ba53-00144feab7de.html#axzz3fsGIA0XZ.

- **March 30, 2015:** ASL's senior sharia official, Abu Abdullah al-Libi, pledges allegiance to ISIS and breaks from ASL, taking a group of fighters with him.
  Source: Jack Moore, "Spiritual Leader of Libya's Biggest Jihadi Group Pledges Allegiance to ISIS," *Newsweek*, April 8, 2015, http://www.newsweek.com/top-judge-libyas-biggest-jihadi-group-pledges-allegiance-isis-320408.

- **March 24, 2015:** Two suicide bombers drive an explosives-filled car into an army checkpoint in Benghazi, killing seven people.
  The army holds ASL responsible and launches retaliatory airstrikes later in the day against Islamist targets.Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "Suicide Bombing Kills Seven in Libya's Benghazi as Army Launches Revenge Strike," Reuters, March 24, 2015, http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0MK2CE20150324?irpc=932.

- **March 23, 2015:** ASL releases a statement acknowledging the death of Mohamed al-Areibi, a senior commander in Benghazi.
  Source: Ayman al-Warfalli, "Suicide Bombing Kills Seven in Libya's Benghazi as Army Launches Revenge Strike," Reuters, March 24, 2015, http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0MK2CE20150324?irpc=932.

- **March 21, 2015 - March 31, 2015:** ASL creates several Twitter accounts to spread propaganda.
  The group had previously replaced accounts as Twitter banned them. In a new strategy, ASL launched several feeds at once.Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya relaunches social media sites," Long War Journal, April 9, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/ansar-al-sharia-libya-relaunches-social-media-site.

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

- **March 19, 2015:** ASL releases photographs showing 14 graduates of an ASL training camp in or near Benghazi.
  The photos show the uniformed fighters training in small arms, in hand-to-hand combat, and studying in a classroom setting.Source: Bill Roggio, "Ansar Al Sharia in Libya Releases Photos of Graduates from Its 'mujahideen Training Camps,'" *Long War Journal*, March 15, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/ansar-al-sharia-in-libya-releases-photos-of-graduates-from-its-mujahideen-training-camps.php.

- **February 16, 2015:** At least 35 Egyptian Coptic Christians are kidnapped in areas controlled by ASL and ISIS.
  Source: "35 Egyptians kidnapped in Libya after anti-IS strikes: report," *The Times of Israel*, February 17, 2015, https://www.timesofisrael.com/35-egyptians-kidnapped-in-libya-after-anti-is-strikes-report/.

- **February 14, 2015:** Gunmen from an "al-Qaeda inspired militia" seize radio and television stations in Sirte, Libya.
  An anonymous resident reported that the station began to play religious songs and lessons. Earlier that week, militants from ASL had "warned the station to stop broadcasting music."Source: "Islamic Militants Seize Radio, TV Stations in Central Libya," *New York Times*, February 14, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-31481797
  .

- **January 24, 2015:** ASL releases a video statement confirming Zahawi's death and swearing revenge.
  Abu Khalid al-Madani, who will later be named Zahawi's successor, promises "the curses of the mujahideen will come successively upon you like thunderbolts."Source: "Libya's Islamists Ansar al-Sharia confirm leader's death - monitoring," Reuters, January 25, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/25/libya-security-islamists-idUSL6N0V40RE20150125.

- **January 21, 2015:** ASL releases a series of photos highlighting the group's policing efforts in Benghazi, showing a fleet of police cars and a police headquarters.
  Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar Al Sharia Photos Focus on Governance Efforts near Benghazi," *Long War Journal*, February 2, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/02/ansar_al_sharia_phot.php.

- **January 26, 2015:** Libyan armed forces accuse ASL of firing rockets on residential buildings in Benghazi, killing six and wounding 20.
  Source: Reuters, "Gunmen Kidnap Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister," *Times of Malta*, January 26, 2015, http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150126/world/Gunmen-kidnap-Libyan-deputy-foreign-minister.553447.

- **January 24, 2015:** ASL releases a video statement confirming al-Zahawi's death and swearing revenge.
  Abu Khalid al-Madani, who will later be named al-Zahawi's successor, promises "the curses of the mujahideen will come successively upon you like thunderbolts." Source: "Libya's Islamists Ansar al-Sharia confirm leader's death - monitoring," Reuters, January 25, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/25/libya-security-islamists-idUSL6N0V40RE20150125.

- **January 23, 2015:** ASL leader Mohamed al-Zahawi dies from wounds suffered months prior when fighting pro-government forces.
  Source: "Leader of Libyan Islamists Ansar al-Sharia dies of wounds," Reuters, January 23, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/23/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0KW1MU20150123.

- **January 3, 2015:** ASL is believed to be behind the kidnapping of 20 Coptic Christians in Libya before ISIS claims responsibility on January 12, 2015.
  Sources: "Libya Shura Council," GlobalSecurity.org., accessed November 5, 2018, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/libya-shura-council.htm; Kevin Truitte, "The Derna Mujahideen Shura Council: A Revolutionary Islamist Coalition in Libya," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no.5 (2018): 6, https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-5/truitte-2.pdf.

- **December 29, 2014:** ASL releases a video showcasing tanks and heavy weapons it acquired after raiding one of General Khalifa Hafter's camps on December 26, 2014.
  The video includes two ASL leaders, Wissam Bin Hamid and Mohammad al-Darsi.Source: Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya showcases spoils of war, key personalities in video," *Long War Journal*, December 29, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/12/ansar_al_sharia_liby_1.php.

- ASL's branch in Derna and other Islamist militias in the region found the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC), which is later renamed the Derna Protection Force (DPF).
  Sources: "Libya Shura Council," GlobalSecurity.org., accessed November 5, 2018, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/libya-shura-council.htm; Kevin Truitte, "The Derna Mujahideen Shura Council: A Revolutionary Islamist Coalition in Libya," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no.5 (2018): 6, https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-5/truitte-2.pdf.

- **November 19, 2014:** ASB and ASD are added to the U.N.'s al-Qaeda sanctions list, noting the groups' connections to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).
  Sources: "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Two Entities to Its Sanctions List," United Nations, November 19, 2014, http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11659.doc.htm;Thomas Joscelyn, "UN recognizes ties between Ansar al Sharia in Libya, al Qaeda," *Long War Journal*, November 19, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/un_designates_ansar.php

- **October 17, 2014:** ASL's leader Mohamed al-Zahawi is injured in an airstrike in Benghazi and flown to Turkey for treatment.
  Source: "Ansar Al-Sharia leader 'almost certainly' killed in Libya," Middle East Eye, December 14, 2014, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ansar-al-sharia-leader-almost-certainly-killed-libya-2105958401.

- **October 15, 2014:** At least 12 people are killed in Benghazi during a renewed offensive by forces under General Haftar.
  Haftar reportedly captures a major military base from ASL. The offensive coincides with the "15 October Uprising." Inspired by posters and Twitter hashtag "#15OctoberUprising," residents across the region coordinate a grassroots revolt against Islamist groups.Source: "Benghazi Residents Take up Arms as Haftar Makes Gains," Middle East Eye, December 17, 2014, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-1558812714.

- **October 14, 2014:** A U.S. federal grand jury indicts Ahmed Abu Khatallah for his involvement in the 2012 attacks on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi.
  Source: "Julia Edwards, "Benghazi Suspect," Reuters, October 14, 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/14/us-usa-security-benghazi-idUSKCN0I32R620141014.

- **October 3, 2014:** Multiple suicide bombings by the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council, Libya Shield, and ASL kill at least 40 Libyan soldiers and wound dozens more in Benghazi.
  Source: "Libya Suicide Blasts Leave 40 Soldiers Dead," Al Jazeera, October 3, 2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/10/libyan-soldiers-killed-benghazi-violence-201410211526230704.html.

- ASL abducts 130 pro-Gaddafi soldiers and volunteers from a military prison in Benghazi.
  Source: "Libya: Lives of captives trapped under fire in Benghazi in danger," Amnesty International, July 21, 2016, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/libya-lives-of-captives-trapped-under-fire-in-benghazi-in-danger/.

- **September 15, 2014:** At least 19 people are killed in a violent, 24-hour clash between Haftar's forces and ASL in Benghazi.
  Source: "Reports: Relatives of Libyan Ambassador Kidnapped in Tripoli," Middle East Eye, December 17, 2014, http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/reports-relatives-libyan-ambassador-kidnapped-tripoli-1500294764.

- **August 25, 2014:** ASL urges Islamist group Libya Dawn to "proclaim that your struggle is for sharia and not democratic legitimacy."
  In response, Libya Dawn "announces its rejection of terrorism and extremism, and stresses that it does not belong to a terrorist organization." Source: Agence France-Presse, "Libya Dawn Islamists 'reject Ansar Al-Sharia Terror,'" Yahoo News, August 26, 2014, https://www.yahoo.com/news/libya-dawn-islamists-reject-ansar-al-sharia-terror-110335904.html

- **July 30, 2014:** ASL announces that it has seized all of Benghazi and declares the city an "Islamic Emirate."
  More than 60 people are killed in the previous week's fighting.Sources: "Benghazi Declared 'Islamic Emirate' by Militants," Al Arabiya, July 31, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/07/31/Libya-s-Ansar-al-Sharia-declares-Islamic-state-in-Benghazi.html;Agence France-Presse, "Islamists Seize Key Benghazi Army Base as Tripoli Fire Rages," Yahoo News, July 29, 2014, http://news.yahoo.com/islamists-main-military-benghazi-004825173.html.

- **July 24, 2014:** ASL overruns the Camp 319 and 36th Battalion bases in Benghazi, capturing howitzers, a 2K12 Kub mobile air defense system, Strela-2 MANPADs, ammunition, and military vehicles.
  Source: Jeremy Binnie, "Libya's Anti-Islamist Offensive Suffers Setback," IHS Jane's 360, July 24, 2014, http://militaryedge.org/articles/libyas-anti-islamist-offensive-suffers-setback/.

- **July 21, 2014:** Fighting between Haftar's forces and the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council near Benghazi and Tripoli escalates, causing thousands of Libyan refugees to cross into neighboring Tunisia.
  Source: "Thousands Flee Libya Violence to Tunisia," Al Arabiya, July 30, 2014, http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/07/29/Islamists-overrun-Benghazi-army-base-killing-30-.html.

- **June 20, 2014:** Islamist groups in Benghazi join together as the "Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council."
  The coalition includes ASL, Libya Shield 1, the Brega Martyrs Brigade, the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade, and the February 17th Martyrs Brigade.Source: Agence France-Presse, "Splits Emerge between Libyan Islamists and Jihadists," Yahoo News, August 18, 2014, http://news.yahoo.com/splits-emerge-between-libyan-islamists-jihadists-183000425.html.

- **June 14, 2014:** Ahmed Abu Khattalah is captured by American commandos and extradited to Washington, D.C. to stand trial.
  The U.S. government claims Khattalah was one of the ringleaders of the 2011 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi. Source: Karen DeYoung, Adam Goldman, and Julie Tate, "U.S. Captures Benghazi Suspect in Secret Raid," *Washington Post*, June 17, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-captured-benghazi-suspect-in-secret-raid/2014/06/17/7ef8746e-f5cf-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52_story.html.

- **June 2, 2014:** ASL launches a counterattack against General Khalifa Haftar's forces.
  Eighteen people are killed and more than 70 are wounded in the heaviest fighting since the start of Operation Dignity. Source: "More Fighting Grips Libya's Benghazi," Deutsche Welle, June 2, 2014, http://www.dw.de/more-fighting-grips-libyas-benghazi/a-17677091.

- Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu, founder and leader of ASD, pledges allegiance to ISIS.
  Source: Aya Elbrqawi, "Derna Cries for Help," AllAfrica, December 1, 2014, http://allafrica.com/stories/201412020345.html.

- **May 16, 2014:** A retired Libyan army general named Khalifa Haftar launches a massive offensive against Islamist militias in Benghazi—codenamed "Operation Dignity"—with a focus on ASL.
  Source: Jomana Karadsheh, "Islamist militants strike back against Benghazi renegades; 15 killed," CNN, June 2, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/06/02/world/africa/libya-violence/.

- **January 10, 2014:** The U.S. Department of State designates ASL branches in Benghazi and Derna as Foreign Terrorist Organizations.
  Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu (described as "the leader of Ansar al-Shari'a in Derna") and Ahmed Abu Khattalah (described as a "senior leader of Ansar al-Shari'a in Benghazi") are designated as "Specially Designated Global Terrorists." Source: "Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar Al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders," U.S. Department of State, January 10, 2014, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/266560.htm.

- Bin Qumu and other ASD members re-surface in Derna as a semi-autonomous branch of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya.
  Sources: Ludovico Carlino, "Ansar al-Shari'a: Transforming Libya into a Land of Jihad," Jamestown Foundation, January 9, 2014, https://jamestown.org/program/ansar-al-sharia-transforming-libya-into-a-land-of-jihad/; Henrik Gråtrud and Vidar Benjamin Skretting, "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya: An Enduring Threat," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no.1 (2017): 40-53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297736; "Mapping Militant Organizations: Ansar al-Sharia (Libya)," Stanford University, August 24, 2016, http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/545#note20.

- **August 6, 2013:** ASL establishes a branch in Ajdabiya.
  Source: Aaron Y. Zelin, "Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi," *Foreign Policy*, August 12, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/12/libyas-jihadists-beyond-benghazi/.

- **June 28, 2013:** ASL establishes a branch in Sirte, Muammar Gaddafi's hometown.
  Source: Aaron Y. Zelin, "Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi," *Foreign Policy*, August 12, 2013, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/12/libyas-jihadists-beyond-benghazi/.

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

- ASB begins to operate under the name of "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya" (ASL) as part of a rebranding effort.
  Sources: Ludovico Carlino, "Ansar al-Shari'a: Transforming Libya into a Land of Jihad," Jamestown Foundation, January 9, 2014, https://jamestown.org/program/ansar-al-sharia-transforming-libya-into-a-land-of-jihad/; Henrik Gråtrud and Vidar Benjamin Skretting, "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya: An Enduring Threat," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no.1 (2017): 40-53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297736.

- **September 22, 2012:** Ansar al-Sharia in Derna reportedly claims it is disbanding.
  Source: Marie-Louise Gumuchian and Peter Graff, "Libyan Army Tackles Rogue Militias as Two Disband," Reuters, September 23, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/23/us-protests-libya-idUSBRE88M08D20120923.

- **September 21, 2012:** As many as 30,000 people march to ASB's headquarters in Benghazi in protest of the prevalence of oppressive militias in post-Gaddafi Libya.
  Hundreds of protesters storm ASB's compound and force ASB militants to abandon the site. Simultaneously, more than 3,000 ASB supporters attend a counter protest in Benghazi.Sources: Maggie Michael, "Libyans storm militia in backlash of attack on US," Associated Press, September 21, 2012, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/libyans-march-against-militias-after-attack;Yasmine Ryan, "Libyans Rise up against Militias' Dominance," Al Jazeera, September 24, 2012, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/09/201292218380199890.html.

- **September 11, 2012:** Four Americans are killed, including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, in an attack against the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.
  In the weeks following, ASD and ASB are condemned domestically and internationally for their alleged involvement in the attack. Sources: David Smith, "Alleged mastermind of Benghazi attack found not guilty of murder," *Guardian*, November 28, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/nov/28/benghazi-attack-not-guilty-murder-ahmed-abu-khattala; Henrik Gråtrud and Vidar Benjamin Skretting, "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya: An Enduring Threat," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no.1 (2017): 40-53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297736.

- **August 25, 2012:** ASB militants deploy an excavator to central Tripoli to destroy the Sidi Al-Sha'ab mosque, which contains the tomb of a Sufi saint.
  Source: Sharron Ward, "The Battle of the Shrines," *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/12/the-battle-of-the-shrines/.

- **August 24, 2012:** ASB militants attack a Sufi shrine in Zliten, destroying the tomb of 15th century Sufi scholar Abdel Salam al-Asmar and burning a mosque library.
  Source: Sharron Ward, "The Battle of the Shrines," *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/12/the-battle-of-the-shrines/.

- **June 7, 2012 - June 7, 2012:** Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi hosts its first "annual conference."
  At least fifteen other militias that support the implementation of sharia in Libya are in attendance. Aaron Y. Zelin, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, later estimates that the conference was attended by up to one thousand individuals based on photos of the event published on Facebook. Sources: Library of Congress Federal Research Division, "Al-Qaeda in Libya: A Profile," Federation of American Scientists, August 2012, http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/aq-libya-loc.pdf; Aaron Zelin, "The Terrorist Threat in North Africa: Before and After Benghazi," Written Testimony before House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade and the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, July 10, 2013, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA18/20130710/101115/HHRG-113-FA18-Wstate-ZelinA-20130710.pdf

- **- :** After the fall of Gaddafi's regime, former Guantanamo inmate Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu establishes Ansar al Sharia in Derna (ASD).
  In February 2012, Mohamed al-Zahawi, Nasser al-Tarshani, and other Libyan Islamists officially form the Ansar al-Sharia brigade (katiba) in Benghazi (ASB). Sources: Kevin Truitte, "The Derna Mujahideen Shura Council: A Revolutionary Islamist Coalition in Libya," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no.5 (2018): 6, https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/issue-5/truitte-2.pdf; Henrik Gråtrud and Vidar Benjamin Skretting, "Ansar al-Sharia in Libya: An Enduring Threat," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no.1 (2017): 40-53, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26297736; Mary Fitzgerland, "It Wasn't Us," *Foreign Policy*, September 18, 2012, http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/18/it-wasnt-us/.

- Ahmed Abu Khattalah founds the Abu Ubaidah bin Jarrah rebel brigade during the uprising against Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. In 2012, the brigade is absorbed by Ansar al-Sharia.
  Sources: Mary Fitzgerald, "A Conversation with Abu Khattala," *New Yorker*, June 18, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2014/06/abu-khattala-before-his-capture.html; Spencer Hsu, "Baring grievous wounds, dry humor, U.S. agent lays out key evidence at Benghazi," *Washington Post*, October 5, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/baring-grievous-wounds-dry-humor-us-agent-lays-out-key-evidence-at-benghazi-trial/2017/10/04/6e11d0f8-a929-11e7-92d1-58c702d2d975_story.html?utm_term=.36aa2e6365b4.

Violent history:

- **October 2018:** Reports of clashes between the Libyan National Army and the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna city.[54]

- **October 2018:** Reports of clashes between the Libyan National Army and the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council in Derna city.[55]

- **April 23, 2018:** Reports of clashes between the Ansar al-Sharia in Derna, the Libyan National Army, and the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council near Wadi al-Arqub west of Derna.[56]

- **January 15, 2017:** The Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council shoots down a Libyan MiG-23 fighter jet over Benghazi.[57]

- **July 17, 2016:** The Benghazi Defense Brigade takes credit for downing a helicopter over Benghazi and killing three French soldiers. The BDB subsequently threatens to turn Libya into a "graveyard for [France] as it was for your three soldiers."[58]

- **February 8, 2016:** ASL shoots down a Libyan MiG-23 fighter jet near the city of Derna.[59]

- **July 9-11, 2015:** At least 19 people are killed in Benghazi during clashes between Libyan soldiers and Islamist militants from the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council.[60]

- **June 26, 2015:** A gunman armed with a Kalashnikov and grenades kills 38 people, mostly European tourists, on a beach in Sousse, Tunisia. The gunman is later identified as Seifeddine Rezgui. ISIS's Libyan branch claimed responsibility for the attack, but authorities believe ASL trained Rezgui.[61]

- **June 23, 2015:** Libyan newspaper *Al Wasat* reports that ASL and other jihadists, including militants from al-Qaeda, are fighting to push ISIS back from Derna. The paper also reports that two Libyan soldiers are killed in fighting with ASL outside of Derna.[62]

- **June 22, 2015:** ASL posts images of its attack earlier that day on General Khalifa Haftar's barracks in Benghazi. ASL states its attack was initiated by a "remote-controlled" car bomb.[63]

- **May 20, 2015:** Clashes erupt between Libyan armed forces and the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council. Nine Libyan soldiers are killed.[64]

- **May 13, 2015:** ASL claims responsibility for launching mortar rockets in Benghazi that kill four children.[65]

- **May 7, 2015:** ASL directs rockets into a residential building in Benghazi, killing two civilians and wounding four others.[66]

- **April 11, 2015:** ASL and other Islamist groups clash with Libyan armed forces in Benghazi, leaving at least 10 dead.[67]

- **March 24, 2015:** Two suicide bombers drive an explosives-filled car into an army checkpoint in Benghazi, killing seven people. The army holds ASL responsible and launches retaliatory airstrikes later in the day against Islamist targets.[68]

- **March 19, 2015:** ASL releases photographs showing 14 graduates of an ASL training camp in or near Benghazi. The photos show the uniformed fighters training in small arms, in hand-to-hand combat, and studying in a classroom setting.[69]

- **February 16, 2015:** At least 35 Egyptian Coptic Christians are kidnapped in areas controlled by ASL and ISIS.[70]

- **February 14, 2015:** Gunmen from an "al-Qaeda inspired militia" seize radio and television stations in Sirte, Libya. An anonymous resident reported that the station began to play religious songs and lessons. Earlier that week, militants from ASL had "warned the station to stop broadcasting music."[71]

- **Late January 2015:** ASL releases a series of photos highlighting policing efforts in Benghazi, showing a fleet of police cars and a police headquarters.[72]

- **January 26, 2015:** Libyan armed forces accuse ASL of firing rockets on residential buildings in Benghazi, killing six and wounding 20.[73]

- **January 3, 2015:** ASL is believed to be behind the kidnapping of 20 Coptic Christians in Libya before ISIS claims responsibility on January 12, 2015.[74]

- **December 29, 2014:** ASL releases a video showcasing captured tanks and heavy weapons it acquired after raiding one of General Khalifa Hafter's camps on December 26, 2014. The video includes two ASL leaders, Wissam Bin Hamid and Mohammad al-Darsi.[75]

- **October 3, 2014:** Multiple suicide bombings by the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council, Libya Shield, and ASL kill at least 40 Libyan soldiers and wound dozens more in Benghazi.[76]

- **October 2014:** ASL abducts 130 pro-Gaddafi soldiers and volunteers from a military prison in Benghazi.[77]

- **September 15, 2014:** At least 19 people are killed in a violent, 24-hour clash between Haftar's forces and ASL in Benghazi.[78]

- **July 30, 2014:** ASL announces that it has seized all of Benghazi and declares the city an "Islamic Emirate." More than 60 people were killed in combat the week prior.[79]

- **July 24, 2014:** ASL overruns the Camp 319 and 36th Battalion bases in Benghazi capturing howitzers, a 2K12 Kub mobile air defense system, Strela-2 MANPADs, ammunition, and military vehicles.[80]

- **June 2, 2014:** ASL launches a counterattack against General Khalifa Haftar's forces. Eighteen people are killed and more than 70 are wounded in the heaviest fighting since the start of Operation Dignity.[81]

- **September 11, 2012:** Four Americans are killed, including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, in an attack against the U.S. consulate in Benghazi.[82]   In the weeks following, ASD and ASB are condemned domestically and internationally for their alleged involvement in the attack.[83]

- **August 25, 2012:** ASB militants deploy an excavator to central Tripoli to destroy the Sidi Al-Sha'ab mosque, which contains the tomb of a Sufi saint.[84]

- **August 24, 2012:** ASB militants attack a Sufi shrine in Zliten, destroying the tomb of 15th century Sufi scholar Abdel Salam al-Asmar and burning a mosque library.[85]

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[54]   Amira El-Fekki, "Egypt's most wanted militant's arrest recounts fighting extremist groups in Derna," Daily News Egypt, October 14, 2018, https://dailynewsegypt.com/2018/10/14/egypts-most-wanted-militants-arrest-recounts-fighting-extremist-groups-in-derna/.

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[57]   Abdulkader Assad, "Benghazi Shura Council downs Dignity Operation warplane in Benghazi, pilot survives," Libyan Observer, January 15, 2017, https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/benghazi-shura-council-downs-dignity-operation-warplane-benghazi-pilot-survives.

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[59]   Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia claims to have downed jet flying over Derna, Libya," Long War Journal, February 8, 2016, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/02/ansar-al-sharia-claims-to-have-downed-jet-flying-over-derna-libya.php.

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[61]   Elaine Ganley, "Terror on the beach: Tourists recount Tunisia attack horrors," Associated Press, June 27, 2015, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/6ac5b8ec60b94245ad9f29c8cbf39f72/terror-beach-tourists-recount-tunisia-attack-horrors; "World briefs: Iraqi militias vow to push Islamic State from Fallujah, site of tough US battle", *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 9, 2015, http://www.post-gazette.com/news/world/2015/07/09/World-briefs-Iraqi-militias-vow-to-push-Islamic-State-from-Fallujah-site-of-tough-US-battle/stories/201507090124.

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[63]   Thomas Joscelyn, "Ansar al Sharia Libya fights on under new leader," *Long War Journal*, June 30, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/06/ansar-al-sharia-libya-fights-on-under-new-leader.php.

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[66]   Ayman al-Warfalli, "Two killed in rocket strike in Libya's Benghazi: medics," Reuters, May 7, 2015, http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/05/07/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0NS1JD20150507.

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Designations:

Designations by the U.S. Government:

- ○ The U.S. State Department designated Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Ansar al-Sharia in Derna as Foreign Terror Organizations on January 10, 2014. [86]
    - ○ The U.S. State Department designated Ahmed Abu Khattalah (ASL Benghazi) and "Abu Sufyan bin Qumu" (ASL Derna) as Specially Designated Global Terrorists pursuant to Executive Order 13224 on January 10, 2014.[87]

Designations by Foreign Governments and Organizations:

- The United Nations designated Ansar al-Sharia Benghazi and Ansar al-Sharia in Derna to its list of "Entities and other groups and undertakings associated with Al Qaida" on November 19, 2014. [88]
- New Zealand designated "Ansar Al Charia Benghazi" and "Ansar Al Charia Derna" as "Organisations associated with al Qaeda" on November 19, 2014. [89]
- Turkey listed ASL as a terrorist organization in November 2014.[90]
- The United Kingdom designated Ansar al-Sharia-Benghazi as a terrorist organization in November 2014.[91]

[86]   "Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar Al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders," U.S. Department of State, January 10, 2014, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/266560.htm.
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[89]   "Designated Individuals and Organisations," New Zealand Police, March 16, 2015, https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/designated-entities-16-03-2015.pdf.
[90]   "Turkey Blacklists Libya's Ansar Al-Sharia," *Hurriyet Daily News*, November 26, 2014, http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-blacklists-libyas-ansar-al-sharia.aspx?pageID=238&nID=74841&NewsCatID=510.
[91]   "Proscribed Terrorist Organisations," U.K. Home Office, February 3, 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/400902/Proscription-20150123.pdf.

Associations:
Ties to entities designated by the U.S. or foreign governments:

- **Al-Mourabitoun**
  The U.N. acknowledged an association between Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi and al-Mourabitoun in a November 19, 2014 press release.[92] French intelligence alleged that Mokhtar Belmokhtar, founder and leader of al-Mourabitoun, met with ASL fighters in Ubari.[93] Half of the 24 operatives involved in the January 2013 In Amenas, Algeria, gas complex attack had reportedly received training at ASL camps in Benghazi.[94]

- **Al-Qaeda Central**
  In November 2014, the United Nations sanctioned ASL as an entity associated with al-Qaeda.[95] Shortly after, former U.K. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond expressed approval of the United Nations' sanctioning, stating that both ASB and ASD "have links with Al-Qaida."[96] In February 2016, the United Nations stated that Ansar al-Sharia in Derna maintained "several terrorist training camps" in the region "mainly for the benefit of Al-Qaida associated groups in Syria and in Iraq."[97]
  Although ASL officially denied any connections to al-Qaeda, the groups openly expressed support for one another.[98] ASL's former emir Mohamad al-Zahawi spoke favorably about al-Qaeda in a 2012 BBC interview, stating that al-Qaeda "help[s] galvanize the Muslim nation, maintain its dignity and pride."[99] Many ASL members had personal connections to al-Qaeda, including former Guantanamo detainee and founder of ASD, Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu.[100]

- **Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**
  French intelligence believes that members of AQIM traveled to Libya to meet with ASL fighters in Ubari, southern Libya.[101] The United Nations, in their designation of ASL as an entity associated with al-Qaeda, stated that ASL was also associated with AQIM and worked to train fighters traveling to Mali.[102] AQIM frequently re-tweeted content posted on official ASL Twitter accounts and published a eulogy for a slain ASL commander on October 29, 2015.[103] In the September 2015 issue of ISIS's *Dabiq*, ISIS in Libya's emir complained about the "closeness" of ASL leaders to AQIM.[104]

- **Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council**
  Also known as the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, the Shura Council is made up of several brigades of anti-Gaddafi rebels, including ASL and Libya Shield.[105]

- **Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST)**
  The United Nations, in its designation of ASL, noted that ASL has a support network among Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST).[106] Tunisian security officials have stated that logistical, financial, and operational ties existed between the two groups, and that ASL sold weapons to AST.[107] Videos of Tunisians captured and interrogated by civilians in Libya suggest that members of AST traveled into Libya to train with ASL. An anonymous founding member of AST commented in a 2013 interview that the relations between Ansar al-Sharia in Egypt, AST, and ASL were like a "spider web." Members of the three organizations met and traveled together in the Gaza Strip and in northern Sinai in 2012, meeting with Palestinian Salafists about administration, organization, and management.[108]

- **ISIS**
  After AQIM rejected ISIS in favor of a continued allegiance to al-Qaeda, ISIS looked to ASL as a possible partner in North Africa. In July 2014, jihadist militants associated with ISIS began posting statements on social media sites and jihadist forums hoping to push ASL to pledge allegiance to ISIS.[109] That summer Abu Sufyan Bin Qumu became the first of ASL's leadership to defect to ISIS.[110] In March 2015, ASL's senior sharia official, Abu Abdullah al-Libi, pledged allegiance to ISIS on Twitter, posting a photo of a book entitled *The Legal Validity of Pledging Allegiance to the Islamic State*. His pledge was accepted by the head of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and the jurist subsequently broke from ASL, taking a group of fighters with him.[111] Lydia Sizer at the Middle East Institute noted that the number of ALS members defecting to ISIS appeared to increase after the group's former leader Mohamed al-Zahawi died.[112]

[92] "Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Adds Two Entities to Its Sanctions List," United Nations Security Council, November 19, 2014, https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sc11659.doc.htm.

[93] Aaron Y. Zelin, "Libya's Jihadists Beyond Benghazi," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 12, 2013, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/libyas-jihadists-beyond-benghazi.

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http://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/africa/51583-141120-un-security-council-adds-libya-s-ansar-al-sharia-to-terror-list.

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http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/11/un_designates_ansar.php.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-welcomes-un-action-to-sanction-libyan-terrorist-groups.

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Media Coverage:

Benghazi Consulate Attack

Within 24 hours of the consulate attack, news agencies began connecting Ansar al-Sharia to the assault. The BBC was one of the first networks to make the connection, stating on September 12, 2012, that Ansar al Sharia "took advantage of a demonstration against a trailer for a controversial American film."[113]   This was the first time the militant group received widespread global media attention.

American media coverage focused on the attack resulting from spontaneous protests against the controversial film "Innocence of Muslims." In a November 2012 study by George Mason University's Center for Media and Public Affairs, researchers concluded that major U.S. news agencies portrayed the attack as a spontaneous protest four times as often as the attack was framed as a premeditated terrorist attack. The researchers posited that this was due to the Obama administration's initial characterization of the attack arising from the spontaneous escalation of the protests.[114] In a September 2012 article, NPR appeared to adopt this view. In an interview with ASL leader Mohamed al-Zahawi, in which he denies any ASL ties to the consulate attack and al-Qaeda, NPR portrays ASL as an unpopular but an almost necessary force to keep peace and stability in the country following the civil war. The report asserted that it was unlikely that ASL was connected to the consulate attack because, as NPR explained, the group was "not interested in provoking the West right now." The report ends with the outlet paraphrasing ASL leaders who say that U.S. should not intervene, since any retaliation would backfire and threaten "this fragile transitional nation."[115]

Fox News was critical of the Obama administration in the aftermath of the attacks. The network focused on what they saw as inaction on the part of the government, both in lack of response and in lack of investigation. Fox was most critical of the U.S. government's hesitation in characterizing the assault on the consulate as a "terrorist attack."[116]

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Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL)

Rhetoric:

ASL tweet, June 24, 2015

ASL does not "fight for this world nor for a certain position, glory, reputation, or admiration." Instead, "we fight in defense of our religion, to establish the rule of God, and to follow the commands of our creator."[117]

Abu Khalid al Madani, emir, radio broadcast, June 18, 2015

ASL and the ummah will "not be able to cast off our humiliation unless we wage jihad."[118]

Captions on photos of ASL militants in a Benghazi training camp, March 19, 2015

"This is the latest class of the protectors of the Shariah and the opposers of injustice graduating from the mujahideen training camps to join their brothers in the battlefronts in order to complete the journey of jihad."[119]

Abu Khalid al-Madani, future ASL leader, video statement, January 24, 2015

"Know that the curses of the mujahideen will come successively upon you like thunderbolts."[120]

Mohamed al-Zahawi, May 2014

"We remind America, if they intervene, of their defeats in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, because they would face in Libya something much worse...It was America who urged Haftar to turn the country towards war and bloodshed."[121]

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