



February 29, 2016

His Excellency the President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

In your February 25th 2016 statement at the Department of State you said, “Beyond Syria and Iraq, I want to point out that we continue to go after ISIL wherever it tries to take root, working with partners from Nigeria to Afghanistan. As we showed last week with our strike on an ISIL training camp in Libya, which targeted a senior ISIL operative, we will continue to use the full range of tools to eliminate ISIL threats wherever they are. Meanwhile, the United States will continue to support the Libyan people as they work to form a new government and regain control of their country, as we’ve seen in recent days with Libyans celebrating in the streets as ISIL was driven from parts of Benghazi.”

Mr. President, your goals may be clear. But your facts are not.

The recent US strike against ISIL in Sabrata in the west of Libya was a welcome support for the efforts to rid the country of the scourge of ISIL terrorism. But that is far from the whole story. And further, your comments about Benghazi were an inaccurate depiction of events in Libya. The conflict in Benghazi is far from the clear fight against ISIL you made it appear.

The Islamic State may have some presence in parts of Benghazi, true. But this presence of ISIL is being used as an excuse to consolidate political and military power by one Libyan faction over another. In this case, fighting ISIL is the justification being given by retired former Qaddafi supporter and General Khalifa Hifter, who many in Libya believe has dictatorial aspirations himself, for his military campaign against Libyan forces – not ISIL. Prospering under the banner of defeating ISIL, the General’s campaigns are reasserting the supremacy of the military in Libya and raising fears of counter-revolution similar to the one that has taken place in Egypt. The majority of the victims of Hifter’s war are civilians and young revolutionaries who fought against Qaddafi forces five years ago.

Amid this disorder and infighting, pro Qaddafi factions, driven underground by the revolution, have found oxygen to breathe and regroup. And they have found opportunity in the aspirations of Hifter.



Benghazi today is a fight between those who overthrew a 42 year-old dictatorship and those who, after the early lure of the revolution faded, want to regain the control they enjoyed in pre-revolution Libya.

The celebrations you referenced, Mr. President, were not in any way a celebration of dislodging ISIL but rather the celebrations of rag tag fighting parties that won some street battles.

There are places in Libya where clear fights against ISIL exist. Derna, in the far east of the country, is one such place. And it's here that you should praise the successful efforts to defeat and dislodge ISIL.

In Derna, the Revolutionary Council of Derna, an alliance of moderate Islamists and local city council leaders, were able to defeat ISIL because they stripped it from its social support. ISIL's foreign presence and violent ways made them an evil that local Libyans themselves rejected and defeated.

After the Sabrata airstrike you mentioned, revolutionaries from many towns all over the western part of Libya moved against ISIL camps and hideouts. Following the strikes, almost 40 revolutionaries died and 100 more were injured fighting ISIL. Hundreds of ISIL fighters were killed or captured including several of their top commanders. But neither you nor other international leaders mentioned these sacrifices.

Mr. President, your advisers must do a better job in assessing and helping you explain the complex situation in Libya. Only in doing so can you avoid the mistake of offering political support to the wrong fighters waging the wrong fight in the wrong city – support that threatens to pave a path to an Egypt-style military counter-revolution and [dictatorship](#).

Only pushing all Libyans to peacefully resolve their differences through political solutions will raise a unified response to ISIL. And only that, with support from the US and others, will defeat ISIL.

It should be clear that the Libyan people, despite the many disputes that have plagued the country recently, agree that there is no place for terrorists in Libya. The determination to cleanse Libya of such a menace provides a productive way for the United States to show good will and political astuteness. Instead of applauding the dishonest efforts of Generals such as Hifter, the US should support the efforts of revolutionaries who are actually fighting to oust ISIL.



At the same time, Mr. President, it's important to note and state publically that the majority of the ISIL fighters who have been killed or captured are non-Libyan. It is high time that the US and the world hold Libya's neighbors responsible for the exportation of these criminals. Tunisia, Niger, and Chad continue to be the major supply lines of terrorists and mercenaries – facts the US and the international communities have been silent and still in addressing.

There is no more room for errors or missteps in Libya. The US still has options in Libya but the best choice is to stand with Libyans and finish the work you started in 2011 when you declared, “wherever people long to be free, they will find a friend in the United States.”

Most Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Esam S. Omeish".

Dr. Esam S. Omeish, President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emadeddin Z. Muntasser".

Emadeddin Z. Muntasser, Secretary General