

## HOW WILL THE UNITED STATES RESPOND TO THE ISLAMIC STATE IN LIBYA?

By Richard J. Pera

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Libya and Surrounding Countries. (Source: CIA, "Libya," The World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>)

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Former Zimbabwean Deputy President Joice Mujuru talks to the Associated Press during an interview at her house in Harare, Wednesday, March 2, 2016. Mujuru announced plans Tuesday to run in elections scheduled for 2018 against President Robert Mugabe. (AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

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On [March 2](#), 2016, the East African Community (EAC) named former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as a new mediator in the Burundi peace talks. Burundi has been dealing with spreading violence in the wake of the July 2015 elections in which President Pierre Nkurunziza was re-elected to what many perceived as an [unconstitutional](#) third term. [more...](#)



U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, right, and Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza shake hands during a joint press conference in Bujumbura, Burundi, Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2016. Ban was in Burundi to encourage dialogue between the government and its opponents amid violent unrest. (Source: AP Photo.)

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The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

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IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

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## Libya's Second Civil War: No Central Authority...Yet

Libya's first civil war ended on October 20, 2011, when Libyan leader Muammar al Qaddafi was killed. The nation's first democratic elections were held in July 2012, and the future looked bright. Nevertheless, today, oil-rich [Libya is in shambles](#). Since the summer of 2014, fighting and political maneuvering—Libya's second civil war—have resulted in a country divided between opposing governments and armies. The government in Tripoli (western Libya) is the General National Congress (GNC), which is backed by armed groups known as Libya Dawn. This group is "Islamist-leaning," includes the Muslim Brotherhood, but rejects jihadist groups like IS and al Qaida-linked Ansar al Sharia. The government in Tobruq (eastern Libya) is the House of Representatives (HOR); it is backed by the Libyan National Army (LNA) and other militias. This group is fiercely anti-Islamist. To make matters worse, the situation has become a [proxy war](#); Turkey and Qatar support Libya Dawn, and Egypt and Saudi Arabia support the LNA. The United Nations (UN)-brokered "[Libyan Political Agreement \(LPA\)](#)," which created a "Government of National Accord (GNA)," was signed in Morocco in December 2015 and endorsed by the [UN Security Council](#) and Western nations. The appointed Prime Minister, Fayaz al Sarraj, is in the process of filling cabinet positions. Progress on launching the GNA is [slow](#), and success is not certain.

## The Islamic State in Libya

As a result of this situation, large portions of Libyan territory have not been governed by a central authority since 2014. As in Afghanistan, Mali, and Somalia, terrorist groups have tried to fill the void. Most alarming is the [growth of IS](#), which now possesses a 150-mile swath of territory east and west of Sirt on the Gulf of Sidra (shown as Surt on the map). During the past year, IS has had an operational presence in both eastern Libya (Darna, Benghazi, and Adjabiya) and western Libya (Misrata, Tripoli, and Sabratha). In addition to recruiting Libyans, IS has attracted foreign fighters to Libya, especially from Iraq and Syria. In January 2016, IS attacked oil facilities at Sidra and Ras Lanuf, suggesting that control of Libya's oil economy is a key objective. An [internal IS document](#) revealed the group is seeking to recruit engineers, explosives experts, oil and gas workers, and physicists. There may be as many as [6,500 IS fighters in Libya](#) today.

## The Islamic State in Libya Threatens Its Neighbors

IS's behavior and rhetoric suggest it is also focused externally. In February 2015, [IS in Libya beheaded 21 Egyptian Christians](#) near Sirt. In response, Egypt and Libya (LNA) conducted combined airstrikes on IS targets in Darna and Sirt. In March 2015, IS in Libya struck inside Tunisia, killing 21 mostly foreign tourists at a [museum in Tunis](#). In June 2015, IS in Libya also struck a seaside [resort in Sousse](#), Tunisia, killing 38 mostly European vacationers. IS appears to view Tunisia as a



Libya and Surrounding Countries. (Source: CIA, "Libya," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>.)

particularly attractive target. The birthplace of the Arab spring, Tunisia is a fragile democracy with maturing institutions and modest security forces. Tunisia's 285-mile border with Libya is porous, although the U.S. and European Union are working diligently with Tunisia to reinforce border security. Targets like the ones described above permit IS to strike Tunisia and Europe simultaneously. Such attacks, which may well continue, undermine Tunisia's all-important tourist economy. Most of those killed were European—[described by IS](#) as “subjects that make up the crusader alliance fighting the state of the caliphate.”

IS could also use Libya as a launching pad for attacks in Europe. This could be done by dispatching suicide bombers in one of hundreds of migrant-laden boats headed for Italy.

In addition, as IS oil revenues in Iraq and Syria wane because of coalition attacks, the group might intensify efforts to control oil facilities in Libya.

### **Scorecard: U.S. vs. Islamic State in Libya—So Far**

In the past year, the U.S. has become increasingly concerned about the unchecked build-up of IS in Libya. Joint Chiefs Chairman [GEN Joseph Dunford, USMC, commented](#) that IS could use Libya as a platform for other activity in Africa: “we’re looking forward to take decisive military action against ISIL [in Libya] in conjunction with a legitimate political process.” [John Brennan, CIA Director](#), warned, “You cannot put off counterterror operations as this long process of government building takes place.” Regarding a potential IS arc from the Gulf of Guinea to the Mediterranean, [BG Donald Bolduc, Commander of Special Operations Command Africa, noted a link to Libya](#), “in the Lake Chad area. . . [IS affiliate] Boko Haram is growing more dangerous thanks to its connections in Libya.”

In February 2016, Secretary of State John Kerry ruled out U.S. military intervention against IS in the near term, saying that a national unity government would stop the expansion of IS. Exceptions to this policy have included two F-15E strikes on IS leadership. In November 2015, [U.S. struck Darna](#) in eastern Libya, killing the “Jihadi John of Libya”—a man known by the nom de guerre, “Abu Nabil.” In February 2016, the [U.S. struck Sabratha](#) in western Libya, killing, among others, a man known as “Sabir,” a Tunisian national and senior IS facilitator linked to IS attacks in Tunisia. President Obama also reportedly approved [deployment of U.S. special operations forces \(SOF\) to Libya](#). [British](#) and [French](#) counterparts are already in country.

### **How Will the U.S. Counter the Islamic State in Libya Going Forward?**

Pending establishment of a unified government, the U.S. likely will continue its intelligence and military focus on IS in Libya. This may include unmanned surveillance missions flown from Sicily, which [Italy approved](#) recently. [Additional airstrikes](#) with precision-guided munitions on high-value leadership targets, including in urban areas, are also possible. If IS continues to expand unchecked by local forces, the U.S. may consider expanding military operations, a scenario we have seen play out in Iraq and Syria.

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On March 1, 2016, Joice Mujuru, vice president of Zimbabwe from 2004 to 2014, officially [launched](#) her new opposition party, Zimbabwe People First (ZPF). Mujuru and ZPF will challenge her erstwhile allies, President Robert Mugabe and his ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party, at the polls in 2018. Mugabe [sacked](#) Mujuru from her vice president position in December 2014, alleging that she sought to overthrow him. The reemergence of Mujuru on the political scene could pose a threat to Mugabe and ZANU-PF, who have been in power for 36 years. ZANU-PF appears weak as it struggles with an economic downturn and the question of who will succeed Mugabe.

## Background: ZANU-PF's Succession Struggle

Mugabe's party has faced a long-running battle over who will replace Mugabe after he departs the political arena, as [highlighted](#) in previous editions of Africa Watch. For years, the struggle was between current Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and Mujuru, both longtime ZANU-PF stalwarts with liberation war credentials. After Mugabe sacked Mujuru and purged [hundreds](#) of her allies from ZANU-PF, Mnangagwa appeared to have the upper hand. But recently, Mugabe's wife, Grace, has led attacks on Mnangagwa and his faction, known as "Team Lacoste." Grace is believed to have her own political ambitions. She is [aligned](#) with a different faction, known as G40. Political [purges](#) continue at the highest levels within the party. Mugabe has continued to [deny](#) that he needs a successor, despite celebrating his 92nd birthday last month: "Why successor? I am still there. Why do you want a successor? I did not say I was a candidate [in 2018] to retire." He also [denied](#) rumors that he would leave the political throne to his wife: "Others say the president wants to leave the throne for his wife. Where have you ever seen that, even in our own culture, where a wife inherits from her husband?"

## ZPF Party Launch and Response

Even as Mugabe keeps his party guessing on the succession issue, his decision to expel Mujuru may soon come back to bite him. At her party's launch, Mujuru, aged 60, outlined a political agenda that contrasts sharply with ZANU-PF's, calling for wide-ranging reforms. She [declared](#): "Today we confirm the existence of a viable, home grown, inclusive political party. Zimbabwe People First is here." She went [on](#): "The time we are living in calls for truth to correct our wrong past. Change for good, unity and determination to build a new Zimbabwe in peace. Zimbabwe faces an urgent need for political, economic and social reform." In September 2015, Mujuru released a policy [document](#), "Blueprint to Unlock Investment and Leverage for Development" (BUILD), which further outlined her political platform. In addition to the above reforms, BUILD called for reengagement with Western countries and a reversal on Zimbabwe's contentious land reform program. Two other former high-ranking ZANU-PF officials, Didymus Mutasa (former state security minister) and Rugare Gumbo (former minister and ZANU-PF spokesperson), also [hold](#) leadership positions in the young ZPF party.

ZANU-PF responded swiftly to the ZPF launch. Last week, Mugabe downplayed the impact of the new party, [declaring](#): "They will live in the wilderness, where little ants and other biting insects are destined to live . . . . Some think we are afraid of them. We are not." Savior Kasukuwere, minister of local government and member of ZANU-PF's highest body, the politburo, [echoed Mugabe](#): "We will defeat them anytime. We are ready for them. What is it that they want to tell us that they couldn't do for 34 years when they were with us in the party?" ZPF's Gumbo [hit back](#): "We are aware of the divide and



Former Zimbabwean Deputy President Joice Mujuru talks to the Associated Press during an interview at her house in Harare, Wednesday, March 2, 2016. Mujuru announced plans Tuesday to run in elections scheduled for 2018 against President Robert Mugabe. (AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)

rule tactics that they [ZANU-PF] want to employ but we are united. They have come up with several strategies to try and destroy our party, and they are welcome because we know them and we are ready to deal with them.”

## Potential Opposition Alliance

At the ZPF launch, Mujuru reiterated her past [statements](#) about welcoming potential alliances with Zimbabwe's other fractured opposition parties. Opposition groups, including the leading opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T), headed by former Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai, applauded the launch of ZPF. Obert Gutu, MDC-T spokesperson, [said](#): “We are willing and able to work and collaborate with any opposition political party that shares the same vision, values and ethos with us. . . . In this respect, therefore, we don't perceive Joice Mujuru and her new political party as our political adversary.” Welshman Ncube, the leader of another MDC faction (MDC-N), [called](#) for an alliance and a “Table of Patriots.” Former Finance Minister, Tendai Biti, who is now head of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), also welcomed Mujuru and ZPF. Gordon Moyo, the secretary general of PDP, [said](#): “We view ZPF as a critical actor in the opposition political society.” Moyo [pointed out](#) that ZPF's previous experience in the state machinery could be an asset for the opposition moving forward: “The majority of them were part of the coercive ZANU-PF system. They know how filthy the system is, they know all the four corners of Mugabe's ZANU-PF, they know the mechanism of electoral corruption.”

## Conclusion

Several signs indicate that Mugabe and his party may be politically weak in the run-up to 2018 elections. These indications include Zimbabwe's current [economic](#) struggles, Mugabe's old age, ZANU-PF's ongoing purges, reports of coming high-level [defections](#), and ostensible splits in the security sector. The addition of Mujuru (and ZPF) to the political arena, with her strong liberation credentials and ostensible grassroots support (in 2014 Mujuru won nine out of 10 provinces in party elections before her expulsion), may be enough to tip the balance and finally remove ZANU-PF from office, especially if she is able to put together an opposition alliance. As argued in the September 17, 2015, [edition](#) of *Africa Watch*, a broad opposition coalition with Mujuru at the helm could substantially increase the chances of a changing of the guard in Zimbabwe. The traditional opposition's positive response to the launch of ZPF suggests that a coalition is a genuine possibility.

Mujuru's ostensible support from some within Zimbabwe's powerful security apparatus could help make this moment unique, because the security sector has remained firmly in support of Mugabe in previous election cycles. Last week, ZPF's Mutasa [spoke](#) on this issue: “I know people in the defense forces, people in the police, people in the Central Intelligence Office who will be very willing to see her [Mujuru] leading Zimbabwe.” Mugabe and ZANU-PF are sure to put up a fight, but stopping Mujuru may prove difficult without the full support of the country's security apparatus.

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## Controversial Elections Lead to Violence

When the Arusha Agreement was signed in 2005, ending Burundi's Civil War, it [designated](#) a two-term limit for the country's highest office. President Nkurunziza justified a third term because he was originally elected by "indirect suffrage" by the National Assembly and Senate, not by popular vote. Opposition groups boycotted the 2015 elections, citing them as [rigged](#), unfair, and illegal, even though the nation's [Constitutional](#) Court upheld Nkurunziza's position.

Between April 2015, when Nkurunziza announced his desire to run for a third term, and the elections in July, at least 70 people were killed, including [opposition](#) leader Zedi Feruzi. Médecins Sans Frontières [estimated](#) that around 1000 people were fleeing into Tanzania each day in fear of violence against opposition supporters. Nkurunziza won the [election](#) with about 69 percent of the vote, although turnout was lower than expected, and extremely low in the capital, Bujumbura (about 30 percent of eligible voters).

## Nkurunziza Does Not Return to Talks in January 2016

On December 28, 2015, peace talks between Burundi's government and opposition began in [Uganda](#), under the mediation of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni. Representatives of the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), and Western nations also attended. The talks are aimed at reaching a political solution to end the violence in Burundi.

The peace talks have bogged down over questions of timing and participation. The dialogue was supposed to begin again on January 6, 2016; however, President Nkurunziza [rejected](#) that date, giving no indication of when he would be willing to resume negotiations. He also rejected amnesty for members of the National Council for the Restoration of Arusha Agreement and Rule of Law (CNARED). Last, [Nkurunziza](#) asserted he would not negotiate with opposition leaders whom he suspected of plotting a coup to prevent his bid for a third term.

## Opposition Parties are Hopeful of Renewed Energy

Since the talks stalled in January 2016, the AU has [pledged](#) to send 200 military advisers and human rights observers to Burundi in an attempt to stem the violence. This pledge comes in the wake of high-level UN and AU visits to Burundi in [late](#) January 2016. At the same time, Human Rights Watch issued a [release](#) documenting the increasingly sinister nature of violence against real or perceived opponents of President Nkurunziza: "The Burundian police, military, intelligence services, and members of the ruling party's youth league are using increasingly brutal methods to punish and terrorize perceived opponents." Stalled discussions are only allowing the violence to continue unchecked.

There is [renewed](#) hope for the peace talks because of the appointment of former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as a new mediator. Although Ugandan President Museveni is recognized as the principal mediator, Mkapa will



U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, right, and Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza shake hands during a joint press conference in Bujumbura, Burundi. Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2016. Ban was in Burundi to encourage dialogue between the government and its opponents amid violent unrest. (Source: AP Photo.)

be co-mediator during new rounds of dialogue. The opposition was especially [encouraged](#) by Mkapa's appointment, as Museveni has been more focused on Uganda's February 2016 presidential elections (and winning a fifth consecutive term) than on peace talks in Burundi. Museveni's domestic distractions, which presumably have lessened following his recent re-election, had been blamed for the slow pace of the talks.

At their summit meeting, the EAC heads of state [unanimously](#) agreed to appoint Mkapa as a new mediator. Mkapa is [respected](#) by many as a new kind of African leader: he is seen as one who did not tolerate corruption during his tenure as Tanzania's president. His reputation adds credibility to the peace process. Nkurunziza was the only leader who did not appear at the summit.

## Conclusion

Since the April 2015 violence [started](#), the UN estimates that around 400 people have been killed and more than 220,000 have fled Burundi. The turmoil in the country shows no signs of stopping, and a diplomatic solution to the problem is more urgent than ever. During a press conference with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, President Nkurunziza [promised](#) to restart the dialogue but did not give a time frame. He did, however, unequivocally reiterate that some members of the opposition would not be included in future talks. Although Mkapa's appointment is a positive step, it remains to be seen if he can be successful in jump-starting negotiations and overseeing a process that all parties perceive as fair.

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