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The current civil war in Libya has inspired discussions about the legacy of Muammar Gaddafi's forty two year rule. The issues of his domestic policy and foreign policy towards the West have been subject to considerable debate, but lesser known aspects of his activities have been somewhat overlooked, particularly the brutality which emerged from Gaddafi's drive for regional supremacy. His ambitions became manifested in a paramilitary organization known as the Islamic Legion, which serves as the focus of this contribution. The Islamic Legion carries importance because the ruptures of this organization are still being felt today with disastrous consequences for political stability and human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has been most discernable in the recent Darfur crisis, which has seen the horrendous effects of militia forces colorized with intense Arab supremacism and racism towards "non-Arabs".

The Islamic Legion was formed in 1973 – some three years after Gaddafi came to power in Libya. Inspired by the French Foreign Legion, Gaddafi created the Islamic Legion as a tool to Arabize the region, and to form the Great Islamic State of the Sahel. The priorities were first Chad, and then Sudan.

Despite the Arab and Islamic-focused ambitions of the group, the Legion was comprised of individuals from various ethnic origins. Both Arabs and Africans came to Libya hoping to find a civilian job, but were instead forcefully recruited to go and fight in foreign lands.

Gaddafi dispatched legionnaires to Lebanon, Syria, Uganda and Palestine. But the Legion was to be mostly associated with the Libyan-Chadian War, where, in 1980, 7,000 legionnaires took part in the second battle of N'Djamena. Provided with inadequate military training, the legionnaires' fighting record was most noted for its ineptitude, and Gaddafi's force was essentially humiliated. The Legion was disbanded by Gaddafi in 1987 as a result of its defeats in Chad and the Libyan retreat from that country.

However,

the Legion's dissolution did not necessarily end endeavors to achieve regional Arab supremacy. The failures of the Legion led to the establishment of an organization called Tajamu al Arabi, translated as "Arab Gathering", which Gaddafi supported, and many of the former members of the Islamic Legion became part of this new elite assembly. The Arab Gathering has been likened to the Ku Klux Klan due to its racist ethos. The Gathering's ideology follows a doctrine known as the Qoreish, which essentially combines Arab supremacism with loose fragments of Islamism. The doctrine evokes a potent and compelling mythology concerning Arabs in the region as it traces the origin of the Juhanya Arabs back to the Prophet Muhammad. Mythologies such as this one provide a powerful way for the Arab Gathering to justify its belief

that it is superior to other groups, even other Arab tribes. The ambitions of the Qoreish doctrine are concerned with power gains in Chad and Darfur through control of regional institutions and forging Machiavellian alliances.

Initially a clandestine group, the Arab Gathering finally emerged publicly in October 1987 when it sent an open letter to the then Sudanese prime minister calling for the "Arab race" to be given greater regional authority at the expense of the Fur and Zaghawa tribes, who were identified as "non-Arabs". The Gathering called these groups "zurga" and "abid", terms implying that they were slaves.

Indications of this drive for Arab supremacy were seen in the Gathering's clashes with the Zaghawa tribes in the 1980s when attacking Arab militias burned villages and wrote Arab nationalist slogans in the ashes. Cross-border raids continued in the years that followed and greatly contributed to a separate ethnic conflict within Darfur that killed approximately 9,000 people and saw a further 100,000 flee to Chad in 1988. The intensity of the violence practiced by these Arab militias earned them the nickname "Janjaweed", which means "devil on a horse", from the local Masalit tribes. Many of these Janjaweed members had been trained and supported by Libya in the 1980s. As a consequence of the violence, an official Sudanese government militia, the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), was tasked with keeping order in the province.

In 2003, a new conflict in Darfur began when two rebel groups, the Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, began attacking Sudanese government and military installations in the province. In response to these attacks, the government of Sudan began its indiscriminate programme of arming and expanding the PDF and the Janjaweed. Most significantly though, militia recruitment now exercised discrimination based on ethnic affiliation. Only Arabs could join the militia forces and "non-Arabs" were prohibited entry. These militia forces were unleashed with brutal effect in Darfur.

Tensions between groups in Darfur had been evident for some time, but the scale of the post-2003 conflict has been greater than before partly because of the militarization of the Arab supremacist position in the region. Arab supremacy and militancy find a potent embodiment in Musa Hilal, who is recognised as both the most prominent Janjaweed leader and the head of the Arab Gathering. Operating with the backing of the Sudanese government in Khartoum, Hilal is clear in his aim to remove the "non-Arabs" from the region with his force of 20,000 fighters.

The war in Darfur has thus far killed between 178,258 and 461,520. The Janjaweed are identified as being responsible for the majority of these killings. After several investigations by NGOs and IGOs were conducted in the region, reports began to circulate evidence of war atrocities. Attacks by militia forces had been deliberately and indiscriminately directed against civilians with the impact of the attacks being resoundingly disproportionate to the threat posed by the Darfur rebels. Villages had been subjected to looting, organised burning; civilians had been raped, massacred and executed. In the areas subject to attack the population was displaced and the landscape became deserted.

The consequences of the present Darfur conflict have forced a significant response from the

international community. Indeed, from Britain alone, 26,000 peacekeepers have been sent in to try and stop the violence. By October 2007, the United States government declared the Janjaweed activities in Darfur to be genocide, and the UN Security Council called for the Janjaweed to be disarmed. In July 2008, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court filed genocide charges against the Sudanese President. Yet despite the numerous initiatives, it seems that the troubles continue in the region.

The violence in Darfur has spread over the border to eastern Chad, but not yet as far as N'Djamena, or the Central African Republic. The Janjaweed have ventured deep into Chad to conduct assaults, resulting in nearly 100,000 Chadians fleeing from their homes in terror. Hundreds of aid workers in Chad have already been evacuated due to increased tension between rebel groups and military forces.

To attribute all of the regional instability, which presently devastates the borders of Chad and western Sudan, solely to Gaddafi's ambitions would be over-simplistic. Nonetheless, the problematic consequences that can be entailed by introducing a credo of Arab supremacy into power ambitions and allowing it to become manifested into paramilitary initiatives cannot be underestimated.

Civil militias, particularly ones with an ethnically charged agenda, are serious sources of concern for international security. More often than not, these militias are characterised by campaigns of severe human rights violations, which can include mass rape, systematic torture, mutilation, genocide and the exploitation of child soldiers. Such activities often necessitate major responses from international actors, which can involve the deployment of aid workers and, in certain instances, military forces. In short, the effects of modern civil militias are not only local, but also international.

Yet despite the magnitude of the human costs engendered by the activities of contemporary civil militias, they remain under-studied and under-discussed by academics and policy practitioners. As such, it is important that the activity of civil militias is monitored more closely in the future.