Chapter Fourteen

Bani Walid

1. Introduction

Bani Walid is located in the Tripolitania region, approximately 170 kilometers (105.6 miles) southeast of the capital, with an estimated population of 50,000 people.1 The center of the town is densely populated, with sparsely populated pockets in the surrounding hills and valleys.2 There are 52 villages in the region.3

Bani Walid was a strategically important city during the uprising and in the post-conflict period due in part to the longstanding tribal links in the area to the Qadhafi regime.4 The region is home to the Warfalla, considered the largest and most influential tribe in Libya, and making up roughly 15 percent of the population.5 Along with the Qadhadhfa and Magarha tribes, the Warfalla were generally strong supporters of the Qadhafi regime.6 The Qadhafi regime traditionally provided financial support and employment for the young men of Bani Walid, relying on economic incentives and informal agreements to ensure strong social support in the

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5 Id.

tribal region. The strategy was part of the Qadhafi regime’s reliance on a patronage system on which the country’s political power structure was based. Due to the historical connections to the regime, Bani Walid was one of Qadhafi’s last bastions of support and experienced continued violence after the fall of the regime.

The Warfalla are roughly divided into three large clans – the Watiyun, the Fawqiyun and the Wadtiyun – spread all over Libya but concentrated mostly in the Bani Walid region. The Warfalla traditionally supported Qadhafi’s tribe, the Qadhadhfa, due to tribal kinship and a history of joining together against rival forces and foreign occupiers. Qadhafi appointed members of the Warfalla to high-ranking military positions, solidifying the close allegiance and support from the tribe. During the 2011 uprising, however, Warfalla loyalty to the Qadhafi regime wavered, with some small factions supporting the rebellion. The most prominent Warfalla leader, Mansur Khalaf, initially aligned with Qadhafi, but in May 2011 refused to send Warfalla members to fight on the side of the regime. Qadhafi continued to send money to the tribe in a bid to maintain support, at the same time as intimidating them by deploying a large number of soldiers in Bani Walid.

Bani Walid became a heavily contested battleground between Qadhafi and thuwar forces, with NATO airstrikes targeting the region after the fall of Tripoli with heavy bombing from 24 August through 17 October 2011. When the rebels finally brought the town under NTC control on 17 August, thuwar forces proceeded to commit violations against local residents in a wave of reprisal violence.

2. Summary of Events

While events in February and March 2011 in Bani Walid were not immediately documented, details later emerged of the early protests and response

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7 Golovnina, *Libyan veteran prepares assault on pro-Gaddafi bastion*, supra note 2.
8 See Ch. I, Sec. 9. See also Alison Pargeter, *Libya: Reforming the Impossible?*, 33 REV. OF AFR. POL. ECON. 225 (2006).
9 See Ch. V, Sec. 2.
11 Id.