

# When Jihadists Learn How to Help

by [Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

May 7, 2014

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Aaron Y. Zelin \(/experts/aaron-y-zelin\)](#)

Aaron Y. Zelin is the Richard Borow Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where his research focuses on Sunni Arab jihadi groups in North Africa and Syria as well as the trend of foreign fighting and online jihadism.



Articles & Testimony

---

## A violent Libyan jihadist group is increasingly using aid efforts and religious education to cultivate a constituency abroad, not just at home.

**W**ithin the academic literature on global jihadi organizations there has been a major lacuna on the issue of groups evolving to become more than just violent actors; many now act as social movements, too. While no one denies this change, little has been written about it, save for smaller non-academic pieces. Thus far, there have only been examples of localized dawa (calling people to the particular individual or group's interpretation of Islam/proselytization), social services, and proto-governance efforts, even if the organizations profess a transnational ideology and goal. However, this trend is no longer true: New evidence suggests that Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) is conducting these types of activities not just in Libya, but also abroad.

ASL has a number of identities as an organization: On the one hand, it's a charity, a security service and a health services and religious education provider. On the other hand, it's a militia, a terrorist organization, and it trains individuals for foreign jihads. While many jihadi organizations are involved in the latter within transnational networks and a smaller percentage are active in the former on a local level, ASL is the only global jihadi organization that has an international dawa campaign. ASL's unprecedented reach belies the notion that the organization has only local aims, while it is in fact attempting to cultivate an international constituency based on aid and proselytization to its strict legal interpretations of Islam...

**[Read the full article on the Washington Post website. \(http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/07/when-jihadists-learn-how-to-help/\)](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/07/when-jihadists-learn-how-to-help/)** ❖

*Washington Post*

---

## RECOMMENDED



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆  
Ben Fishman

(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)

## TOPICS

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

## REGIONS & COUNTRIES

