

## Libya releases 214 ex-militants



Jailed members of the Libyan Islamic fighting group after their release from the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli on Wednesday. (EPA)

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**TRIPOLI: 214 former militants on Wednesday walked out the gate of Libya's most notorious jail after a release brokered by a son of Libyan President Muammar Qaddafi.**

Those freed included leaders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. The release was part of a program of reconciliation with militants who killed dozens of soldiers and police in the 1990s, and also represented a boost for reformers, led by Qaddafi's son Saif Al-Islam.

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was formed in the early 1990s by Libyans who had formerly fought against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and later launched an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Qaddafi.

The Libyan program is just one of many attempts by Middle Eastern governments to reintroduce former militants back into society. Magnus Ranstorp, a terrorism expert at the Swedish National Defense College said that the various programs' successes have been varied.

"Everything is relative and the definition of success in the Middle East itself varies," Ranstorp said.

"The largest program has been the Saudi program, which I visited in February 2008 and was given the opportunity to talk to some of the prisoners," he said. "They are divided into two categories, the first one is those who have been manipulated by Al-Qaeda leaders in Iraq and for these the program has been a success." "The second category is those that have returned from Guantanamo, who are much more hardened and more ideological," Ranstorp continued. "For the second category it (the program) has not been very successful."

David Hartwell, North African Terror Expert at Jane's, said that different government programs had distinctive goals.

"The Libyan program is more focused on making sure that those released are not a threat to the government, while the Saudi program is more interested in eradication and is more compressive," he told The Media Line, pointing out that the Saudi program had a more international focus.

"The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is no longer a threat," Hartwell added, pointing out that anyone who is released is kept under close surveillance. "There have been sporadic releases and there have not been any attacks on the government so in that sense it has been a success."

Counter-terrorism expert Claude Moniquet said that Algeria and Morocco have their own reconciliation programs, but their success has been limited.

"I don't think it's working," Moniquet said. "In Morocco there has been a reconciliation program since the bombing attempts in Casablanca May 2003, after which there were arrests and people sent to jail.

— With input from agencies