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NATIONAL SECURITY RESEARCH DIVISION

Libya After Qaddafi

Lessons and Implications for the Future

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Prepared for the Smith Richardson Foundation

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Summary

Since the 2011 overthrow of the Qaddafi regime, Libya's path has been tumultuous. Despite a number of advantages compared with other post-conflict societies, progress on political, economic, and security fronts has fallen far behind, generating frustration and threatening the recovery altogether. Libya has teetered on the brink of a relapse into civil war on more than one occasion in the past year. In the absence of a functioning state, jihadist groups have made inroads. The broader Sahel and Maghreb regions, meanwhile, are becoming more and more fragile and southern Libya verges on becoming a safe haven for al Qaeda–linked groups recently chased from Mali by French military forces.

The right international approach to Libya could nevertheless still help avert a more serious breakdown and real damage to U.S. and European regional and global interests—above all counterterrorism and the stability of world energy markets.

This study examines what has been accomplished in Libya to date, draws lessons from the experience, and identifies some possible ways forward.

Lack of Security

Libya's most serious problem since 2011 has been the lack of security. Insecurity has had negative repercussions across the spectrum. It has undermined efforts to build functioning political and administrative institutions, further constricted an already minimal international

footprint, and facilitated the expansion of criminal and jihadist groups within Libya and the wider region. Libyan political leaders have been under constant threat of attack, as displayed most dramatically in the October 2013 kidnapping of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan.

The lack of security stems primarily from the failure of the effort to disarm and demobilize rebel militias after the war. Both international advisors and Libya's political leadership recognized the importance of rebel disarmament from the outset, but neither has been able to implement it. As a result, various types of armed groups control much of the country and the elected government is at their mercy. Until the security situation is brought under control, progress on all other fronts will be very slow and always at risk.

Stalled Statebuilding Process

The lack of security has greatly undermined an already difficult statebuilding process in Libya, where the post-Qaddafi state was very weak politically and administratively. To begin with, Libya's constitutional process has not kept pace with the schedule originally set out during the war. That schedule aimed to provide Libya with a constitution within a year of liberation. More than two years after Qaddafi's death, however, the constitutional drafting committee has yet to begin its work.

Meanwhile, groups in the eastern province of Cyrenaica have seized control of oil facilities there and threatened to create an autonomous state-within-a-state. Islamist and revolutionary groups have forced the passage of a political isolation law that excludes many Libyans from participation in government, thus exacerbating existing rifts in society and reducing the available pool of talent for government positions. The General National Congress, which was elected in July 2012, has been deeply divided over many issues.

In general, Libyan public administration is in very poor shape and capacity building is sorely needed to strengthen the state. Public confidence in the democratic political process has declined as frustration has mounted. In the absence of a national state, regional and tribal

substate actors have strengthened and will likely seek to hold onto their entrenched power.

Economic Challenges

Oil production restarted quickly in the aftermath of the war and has allowed Libya to avoid some of the most serious choices that post-conflict societies face because it could fund reconstruction and pay salaries to many groups, including militias. With the armed takeover of many of Libya's oil facilities in the summer of 2013, however, the stability of Libya's economy—including the ability of the government to continue to pay salaries indefinitely—was drawn into question. Libya also eventually needs economic reforms that will create a more business-friendly environment. The postwar Libyan government has taken a few steps in the right direction, but it has also been forced to increase government salaries and subsidies, both of which distort the economy and work against sustainable, broad-based economic growth.

Upping the International Role

Despite a significant investment of military and political capital in helping the Libyan rebels overthrow Qaddafi, international actors have done very little to support Libya's post-conflict recovery to date. In contrast with all other cases of NATO military intervention, a very small United Nations (UN) mission with no executive authority has led the international effort to help stabilize the country. The United States and its NATO allies have played a very limited role.

International actors have recently started increasing their efforts in Libya somewhat. More should have been done and still needs to be done, however. The United States and its allies have both moral and strategic interests in ensuring that Libya does not collapse back into civil war or become a safe haven for al Qaeda or other jihadist groups within striking distance of Europe. Terrorist violence is already a problem in Libya, and any increase could have a devastating impact

on the fragile and failing Sahel region. Needless to say, if Libya were to become a terrorist safe haven, it would be a very serious problem for the West and a tragic end to the West's well-intentioned and initially very effective effort to topple Qaddafi. It would be tragic if that initial victory were allowed to turn into strategic defeat.

In contrast, if Libya sees gradual political stabilization under representative government and constitutional rule, the United States and its allies would benefit from Libya's energy and other resources. The region as a whole would also be much stronger.

Improvements will take time, but despite its current challenges, Libya still has many advantages when compared with other post-conflict societies. Notably, it can foot much of the bill for its post-conflict needs—even if it currently lacks the administrative capacity to manage complex payments to foreign entities.

The Way Forward

Improving Libya's future prospects will take several years, given the limited international role. There are four areas that international actors should focus on while looking ahead:

Support a National Reconciliation Process

The most serious problem in Libya today is continued insecurity, which impedes political and other advances and could wipe them out altogether. Absent an international peacekeeping force, which should be considered but would be difficult under current circumstances, the best way to improve security is to engage Libyans in a national reconciliation dialogue. Such a process could facilitate disarmament, complement constitution making, and increase international actors' access to information about the capabilities and intentions of key Libyan groups. Although the process would need strong support from the Libyan government itself, outside actors, such as the UN or European Union (EU), could play crucial facilitating and mediating roles. Objectives of such a process could include creating a vehicle for broader discussions of disarmament, establishing rules of the road, and generally building

trust and increasing the flow of information between different Libyan groups. Ideally, the process would be led by a high-level European, such as Paddy Ashdown, or another figure of international stature from a Muslim country. The newly created position of U.S. Special Coordinator for Libya could also play a role.

Strengthen Libya's National Security Forces

Insecurity in Libya is partially attributable to a lack of reliable national security forces. International actors are well placed to help remedy this lacuna, and Libya is prepared to foot the bill. Recent U.S. and European efforts to train a so-called "general-purpose force" of approximately 15,000 over the next several years will help. The effort should proceed in parallel with reconciliation and strike a balanced representation of Libyan society, lest individual groups perceive the training as being directed against them and revolt. Police training is also much needed.

These efforts need to be fully funded. The Libyans should pay for as much as possible, but other countries should also contribute as needed, especially while Libya's institutional capacity for payments is still weak.

Help Libya Strengthen Border Security

Border security remains a major challenge. The porousness of Libya's borders and their susceptibility to smuggling and the circulation of criminals and jihadists will continue to undermine Libyan and broader regional security. Improvements will take time and require building institutional capacity within the Libyan state as well as investments in monitoring capabilities, such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms. Establishing an effective, modern border-management system, with all its legal and administrative requirements, will be far more difficult given the sorry state of Libya's legal and administrative structures. International efforts in this area exist but need to be greatly expanded if they are to have any impact.

Help Libya Build Its Public Administration

The personalistic nature of the Qaddafi regime left Libya with a severe lack of public administrative and bureaucratic structures. International actors are well positioned to help Libya improve its public administration, especially if the security situation improves. The EU and its member states are in a particularly good position for this task, due to their proximity to Libya. They should significantly increase their level of effort as soon as the security situation improves. As a temporary alternative, training in Europe should be encouraged. This training should include local as well as national-level institutions.