



Winning The Peace Collectively

It is neither too early nor too flagrantly self-congratulatory for NATO to declare victory in the military phase of its recent foray into North Africa. Nevertheless, just as the international community was crucial to the rebels' success in overthrowing Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, so too will it be vital to the stabilisation efforts that are now underway, and in the ensuing process of transition to legitimate governance capped by the nation-wide elections slated for 2012.

A Libyan rebel fighter is silhouetted next to El Malti Mosque.



policymakers and the interested public to recall the reasons why an international coalition collectively intervened in support of the anti-Gaddafi uprising. That helps us to understand why the United States (US), Europe and their partners should remain committed to the rebuilding of Libya through the mechanisms of the UN and the full international community, rather than bilaterally.

It takes nothing away from the bravery of the rebels to recognise that Benghazi - the epicentre of the rebellion - would have been crushed in the days after March 19 were it not for the aerial intervention of the international community. By withholding ground forces, and acting in support of an organic political movement forged within the country, the foreign jets - led in the first days by the US, then taken over by NATO - did nothing to undermine the authentically Libyan nature of the uprising. On the diplomatic and financial side, the use of a broad multilateral coalition, the Libya Contact Group, informally led by France and Qatar, to assist a genuinely Libyan social movement, has quietly reinvigorated the case for international diplomatic intervention in crisis zones, even if the necessary conditions may not recur for some time.

More broadly, Tripoli's capture by disparate militias, all loyal to the anti-Gaddafi cause but lacking joint command and control structures, presents what may be the greatest opportunity of the Arab Spring - however fraught it may also be with the possibility for anarchy. One might assume that Libya's better long-term prospects relate solely to the fact that it has more oil than its revolutionary peers. In fact, there are uniquely Libyan political factors, as well as the particular role of the international community in the Libya uprising, which augur well for the future. Libyans can begin building their future free from the possible predations of colonial powers, or an established military of the sort that could become the arbiter of legitimacy in Egypt and Tunisia. Whereas Egyptians and Tunisians rebelled against the domestic inequities caused by crony privatisation and the globalisation of self-serving elites, and may therefore chart an inward-looking course, supervised by a surviving military old guard, Libyans yearn to reconnect with the wider world from which they were cut off by Gaddafi.

This reconnecting of Libyans with the west is not about putting boots on the ground, whether in the form of stabilisation police or a full-blown occupation. Nor is it about shovelling aid into a bottomless pit. It is about helping Libyans pass through their moment of maximum post-revolutionary danger. That requires urgently providing practical support to the process of forging a government recognised as legitimate inside Libya, as well as internationally.

By Gaddafi's design, Libya is a state deliberately devoid of institutions. The necessary collaboration is therefore 'institution-building by invitation'. The west must lend a hand only when, and in the areas that, the new Libyan leadership asks for assistance. Moreover, if the key western powers agree to work through the UN, the Libyans are more likely to voluntarily ask for a whole range of assistance which may keep the transition on track. Until the transition is complete and

CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR POST-CONFLICT assistance to Libya was begun five months ago under the assumption that the United Nations (UN) would take the lead coordinating role. Despite traditional American fears about UN bureaucracy and inefficiency, UN oversight of separate national contributions is the right path forward in the Libyan case. Moreover, leaked UN post-conflict deployment plans leave even the most skeptical observer impressed with its preparations and the knowledge of the limitations under which it operates.

The fate of Tripoli is presently shrouded in both a cloud of uncertainty and a haze of potential. Now is the time for

stable, Libya has the potential to destabilise her neighbours via terrorism, a flood of migrants resulting from a crumbling state, and insecurity in energy markets.

Libya experienced the 1990s as an international pariah, as a result of Gaddafi's strategy in the previous decade to employ terrorism abroad to buttress his internal ideological legitimacy. It would be tragic if the new Libya were to founder by once again becoming a haven for itinerant terrorist groups.

Abdel Hakim Belhaj, the rebel fighter who led the assault on Gaddafi's compound and now leads the Tripoli Military Council, is a former commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a long-defunct Islamist group that had ties to al Qaeda. The uprising spawned many militias (kata'ib), each with their own forms of solidarity. Although most focus on regional or familial ties, some draw on Salafist or Islamist rhetoric, such as the Darna Brigades. An Islamist-influenced militia in Benghazi is suspected to have killed rebel commander Abdul Fattah Younes on July 28. The long-term danger is not that Islamist militias will seize Tripoli or come to predominate in the rebels' political leadership, but rather that a political splintering or sustained low-level insurgency could create welcoming pockets of space for international jihadists.

The short-term aim is not to adopt a confrontational attitude toward the moderate Islamist strands in the opposition, which would contribute to instability, but instead ensure that they are slowly disarmed and integrated into a constitutional order. All voices, including Islamist ones, must be heard in the new Libya. Yet all legitimate social forces must express themselves politically rather than violently. As Taimur ben Aziz of the Executive Office of the National Transitional Council (NTC) has stated publicly, 'the number one concern of all Libyans must be figuring out how to demilitarise the Libyan society'. If the NTC asks for assistance in this realm, the international community should bring to bear all its relevant experience.

Over the course of the last decades, Gaddafi discovered how to use African economic migrants as a political lever to pressure the European Union (EU) - Italy in particular - to assent to his demands. He learned that by allowing all sub-Saharan Africans the right to work in Libya without a visa, he could transform Libya into a barrier of illegal migrants to Italy's shores. When Gaddafi wanted to increase his bargaining leverage he would intentionally relax the policing of Libya's Mediterranean coastline while simultaneously facilitating the entry of Africans via the borders with Chad and Niger. Conversely, when Gaddafi wanted to reward Italy, he could turn off the tap by patrolling Libya's Saharan borders and telling the Libyan coast guard to apprehend Africans who boarded boats for Lampedusa.

Now that Gaddafi is out of power it is unlikely that the TNC will seek to utilise African migrants as political tools. Yet it is a certainty that only a strong and stable Libya will be able to adequately police its borders. If Libya's economy is slow to improve or, even worse, descends into anarchy, Libyans will join Africans in trying their luck fleeing northward to Europe. Should the NTC ask for training of its border guards, as Gaddafi had begun to do in the wake of the Italo-Libyan

Friendship Treaty of 2008, the international community should provide the best capacity building assistance possible.

When it comes to migrants and to restoring oil production, Libya's transition phase is a perfect example of the importance of preventative action. The country has the highest proven oil reserves in Africa - at 44 billion barrels - and it exports a particularly desirable form of sweet crude oil. Both make it far more consequential than its pre-conflict two percent share of world output suggests.

There are at least three reasons why promptly restoring security, and therefore oil production, is so critical. First, Libya's oil has a high wax content, which means that it can damage equipment in which it remains for long periods. Any oil stuck in the pipes for months makes restarting the flow challenging. Second, the TNC can only establish its legitimacy if it can pay wages and provide services. Though Libya in theory is a wealthy country, it has a cash flow problem while oil output is stalled. Third, Libya is the most important source of European oil behind Saudi Arabia, Russia and Norway. As Europe teeters economically, a fall in its input prices would give a fillip to growth.

It will take some time for Libya to repair its damaged infrastructure, invite back expatriate labour, and return to pre-conflict production levels of 1.8 million barrels a day. With a stable government in place, this could be achieved by early 2013. Moreover, if a post-transition government offers favourable terms for new exploration and development of existing finds, there is no reason why a stable Libya can't double pre-conflict oil production by 2016. This is not pie in the sky: despite former National Oil Corporation Chairman Shukri Ghanem's 2008 boast that he could double Libyan oil production in five years, Gaddafi's policies were doing nearly everything to scare away the international expertise needed to develop Libyan reserves. Hence, actual production largely stagnated from 2008-11.

With a modicum of stability in place and intelligent modifications to Libya's oil laws, undertaken by an elected and fully legitimate government, international companies might flock back to Libya and build there the world's most modern oil infrastructure, as they did in the late 1960s and early 1970s when conditions were favourable. The big catch is that the economic conditions which would allow private sector engagement can only happen after a successful transition period.

This might tempt some EU and American policymakers to single-handedly grab hold of Libya's transition in an attempt to steer it towards their vision of stability. That would backfire. As a result of its location, Libya has always been an international (not merely a European, American, or even Arab or African) concern. It was the first and only state successfully created by a UN decree, in 1949, and its constitutional convention and transition to full independence in 1951 was successfully overseen by international consensus and joint action. Sixty years later, Libya once again requires an international solution.

What should that solution look like? Experience suggests that assistance should always be coordinated with the local governing body in a way that builds its capacity rather than





The leader of Libya's interim government with Transitional National Council Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron in Tripoli.


creates dependency. Although this sounds obvious, a collaborative approach to nation building has yet to be mastered. It remains one of the thorniest problems for UN post-conflict teams. From the US perspective, it is clear that policymakers must avoid looking at stabilisation efforts and capacity building in Libya through a uni-dimensional counter-terrorism lens. Such an approach in Yemen reinforced Ali Abdullah Saleh's perverse combination of tyranny and ineptitude.

The danger of inadvertently transforming the NTC leadership into pro-western puppets is particularly acute in Libya. That is what happened after 1951 when the UN's supervised transition to independence was underwritten by the British and the Americans leading to the creation of a proxy state with an indigenous veneer. Today, unfreezing Gaddafi's vast reserves of treasure combined with western policing assistance might grant the NTC leaders the economic ability to divorce themselves from the consent of the Libyan people. Afghanistan is a cautionary tale of entrenching and enriching venal elites while building up their security forces. This potential problem would then be compounded once Libya's oil starts flowing.

The architects of the new Libyan state must ensure that the oil sector doesn't emulate Iraq's or Nigeria's. That requires crafting proper distributive institutions that guarantee that oil wealth is used to generate real development rather than personal plunder. Imposing conditionality on the release of frozen assets is inherently paternalistic, but it could be the surest way to guarantee that the TNC follows through on its own roadmap to democracy as articulated by interim Prime

Minister Mahmoud Gebril.

So far, however, indications are good that the NTC wishes to expand its structures outside its home base of Cyrenaica - the eastern part of the country - and become truly accountable to Libyan citizens. NTC leaders have already asked for UN assistance in preparing for and later monitoring elections, as well as including previously marginalised groups like women and minorities in the institutions of self-governance.

The long road to Gaddafi's downfall began with a multilateral process addressing the emerging crisis in eastern Libya. A similarly broad-based process, under the auspices of the UN rather than a handful of victorious powers, should now turn to winning the peace. The political burdens of 42 years of tyranny cannot be erased in weeks. With the measured assistance of the international community - buttressed by lessons gleaned from previous failed unilateral interventions - Libya has every chance of redeeming the considerable promise for which so many Libyans have already made the ultimate sacrifice. 

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