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Assessment Report

Western Military Intervention

and the Future of Libya

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U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973, which calls for the implementation of a no-fly zone over Libya and an immediate end to all attacks on civilians taking “all necessary measures,” including air-strikes, to protect civilians and civilian locations in Libya, has kindled a debate in political, academic, and popular Arab circles on the nature of the external intervention and its potential outcome. The debate is happening despite the resolution having been passed on the basis of an express Arab League request calling on the Security Council to intervene to stop the killing of Libyan civilians by the Gaddafi regime. The Security Council resolution prohibits the occupation of any part of Libya, going only as far as imposing a no-fly zone on Libyan airspace and calling for measures to protect civilians. The acceleration of events and the increased pace of military operations, however, have increased the intensity of the controversy, whether at the international level or at that of Arab public opinion.

Western military intervention in Libya initially received a kind of acceptance as a result of the nature of the Gaddafi regime and its lack of moral dimension demonstrated by its brutal use of force against peaceful civilian demonstrators. However, military operations have affected Arab public opinion, especially because of the heightened sensitivity of this public opinion towards foreign military intervention after the occupation of Iraq. A significant difference in this case is that part of the forces that previously fought against the American occupation of Iraq are directly involved in the struggle against Gaddafi, particularly the Islamic movement in Libya and its allies in the region. The Arab public’s position towards what is happening in Libya after the air strikes can be characterized as hesitation more so than anger, akin to the rage that spread throughout the Arab world during the military intervention against Iraq. Gaddafi’s regime has also been unable to affect the growing opposition to him despite his desperate attempts to impose a religious dimension to the nature of the conflict, to portray it as an attack on Islam and as neo-colonialism targeting the entire region.

The developments in Libya are set against a backdrop of international interests that overlap with the priorities and interests of the Libyan movements at home and abroad in an atmosphere characterized by a scarcity of trust and an abundance of skepticism. As such, the situation is based on an analysis of the interests of the states involved and the priorities of the Libyan movements taking part on the ground.

International interests in Libya are mainly concentrated on energy resources and the acquisition of spheres of influence in Africa. In addition to the comparative advantage of Libyan oil, in terms of quality and low cost of extraction and export because of its proximity to the coast and European markets, Libyan activity on the African continent has, in recent times, been a source of provocation for France and South Africa, as well as for the United States and other aspiring powers. Since 2003, however, signs of understanding and even coordination between Libya and Britain and the United States, at the level of foreign policy, have emerged, and have included the zones of contention in Africa. In return for a set of Libyan concessions on previously held positions, the Gaddafi regime was able to ensure the maintenance of his regime as well as agreement on the succession of his son, who took over the implementation of the about-turn in foreign policy that led to new alliances with America and Britain, and reached the limit of coordination with their Arab allies, including those active in the Palestinian arena.

In addition to the economic and strategic considerations mentioned above, intervention in Libya allows these regimes to publicly renounce relations with Gaddafi; relations that have been based on known and unknown interests which were, in all cases, embarrassing when displayed to Western public opinion, including matters such as the relationship between foreign policy successes and their benefits during domestic elections.

The African continent sits atop about 10% of the world's proven oil reserves, and is primarily (60%) concentrated in three main oil-producing countries: Nigeria, Algeria, and Libya. As Libyans set out to change the Gaddafi regime, the door was opened for international players to re-position themselves to compete for shares of oil reserves estimated at 41.5 billion barrels, as well as natural gas reserves estimated at 51 billion cubic feet, both in addition to geo-strategic spheres of influence.

The Italian reluctance to support the no-fly zone that lasted until the Paris Conference can be partly explained by the fact that the Italian company "Eni" is the largest oil company operating in Libya. Eni produces about 550,000 barrels per day, with Libyan oil accounting for 14% of its total revenue. Eni is followed by the Austrian company "OMV," for whom Libyan oil accounts for 10% of total revenue, who is, in turn, followed by the U.S. company "Marathon Oil" (11%), and the Spanish "Repsol" (5%). The French company "Total" ranks low, with its Libyan oil revenue accounting for only 2% of its total revenues.

Among the great powers, France seems to be the one that benefits the least from Libyan oil contracts. By juxtaposing this factor to the French reluctance towards the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt, French enthusiasm for the overthrow of Gaddafi appears to be in tune with the priorities of a country that sees itself as having lost the respect of Arab public opinion—because of its contradiction of ideals rooted in the French revolution by supporting the Ben Ali dictatorship until that regime's dying moment—and wants to repair this damaged image. Preparations for the upcoming French elections are also relevant here. On the other hand, France wants to hold Gaddafi to account for his defiance and his challenge to the French extension of their influence in Africa.

The United States was unable to maintain its reluctance towards intervention in Libya while France insisted on moving it forward, as France would gain the advantage in the competition between the two countries for influence in North Africa in the event that the United States decided to refrain from participation. The United States has established spheres of influence and interests through "AFRICOM," and began to penetrate the area of French influence in Mali and Niger as part of its campaign to fight al-Qaeda. They also established a military base to train Malian and Nigerian forces in the Gao district in northern Mali. France responded by reestablishing its military presence in both Mali and Niger, with plans to arm and train the armies of both countries within the framework of the so-called "war on terror." France also increased the deployment of its troops in the coastal and desert areas along the belt connecting Mauritania from the west to Chad in the east, reaching as far as Djibouti. Both states now vie for strategic superiority in a post-Gaddafi Libya, which is why neither state will allow the other singular access to potential new areas of influence, including Libya.

Given the political forces active on the Libyan political scene, it seems clear that the balance of power tilts in favor of the forces opposed to the Gaddafi regime, a 42-year dictatorial regime which been characterized by chaotic rule that lacks clarity, and has been repulsive

both locally and internationally. Libya did not achieve a level of development that is consistent with its massive potential. Instead, the Gaddafi regime squandered its resources on the Chad and Sudan wars, the Lockerbie crisis and arming the Irish Republican Army and others. Perhaps the contempt Gaddafi displayed towards the Libyans and Arabs has undermined his legitimacy and reinforced the moral and political legitimacy of his opponents.

While Gaddafi's political and moral legitimacy plummets, the Transitional National Council has appeared as an acceptable alternative domestically, regionally, and internationally. The Council is composed of thirty-one members representing various regions of Libya and its cities. The names of some of these members have been publicly announced, while the names of the representatives from the cities of Ajdabiya, Kufra, Ghat, Nalut, Mizurata, al-Zintan, and al-Zawiyah have not been released for security reasons. The Council is currently working to create administrative bodies to manage the affairs of productive and service sectors, but has yet to announce the formation of a government. The Council received actual—albeit unofficial—recognition of the Arab League and France, and has become the main party with which international actors communicate and coordinate.

The Muslim Brotherhood are the most organized political force in Libya, considering the relative weakness of oppositional organization in Libya in light of the Gaddafi regime's disruption of any possibilities for building and sustaining viable organizations. The relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Gaddafi regime remained tense throughout the recent decades. Saif al-Islam Gaddafi promulgated his reforms on August 21, 2007 when he promised political freedoms, and the application of his personal theory of "direct democracy and the rule of the people" with a commitment to the inviolability of certain "red lines," which he defined as the application of Islamic law, the security and stability of Libya, the unity of the country and Muammar Gaddafi. The Muslim Brotherhood agreed to the plan, and entered into direct dialogue with Saif al-Islam as mediators in the process of reconciliation between the Gaddafi regime and the Libyan Fighting Group, a large number of whom were languishing in prison

The Libyan Fighting Group is one that has adopted a Salafist, jihadist ideology. It is an armed faction that was established by a group of young Libyans who took part in the fighting against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Group also carried out armed attacks against civilian and security targets in Libya in the 1990s with the aim of overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi. However, the Libyan armed forces and security agencies all but eradicated the faction, arresting a large group of them in the process. In 2009, leaders of the Group began to review their ideas, resulting in an apology that was agreed upon with the state which ultimately led to the release of the imprisoned fighters.

There are other Libyan forces that publicly promote their democratic programs, such as the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, which was founded in October 1981 as a faction opposing the Gaddafi regime in Libya and seeking to overthrow him and establish a constitutional democratic alternative. The National Front believes that confronting the Gaddafi regime requires the unification of all national elements—inside and outside of Libya—behind an all-encompassing program of struggle and action, aimed at the overthrow of Gaddafi, as well as all those connected to him, and the liberation of Libya from him using all possible, legitimate means. The National Front has proposed several steps for the transition to a democratic system post-Gaddafi. Notable among these is the carrying out of a

"general election" within six months of the formation of the Presidency council and interim government. The goal of the election would be to select the "National Constituent Assembly," the functions of which would include the drafting of a "permanent constitution" for the country that would be put to a general referendum. Another of the Front's proposed steps is the carrying out of a "general presidential election" in accordance with the new constitution after its adoption by the people.

In addition to these forces, a group of Libyan liberal movements such as the Libyan National Alliance, the Constitutional Union, and the National Democratic Assembly, have joined forces to form the "National Conference of the Libyan Opposition." This coalition held two conferences in London in 2005 and 2008; during both conferences, they called on Gaddafi to step down and for a return to a constitutional order.

As was noted during the revolution, some portions of Libyan society that live abroad developed a discourse that was directed to a Western audience more so than an Arab one, and that was translated as a sincere Libyan desire for Western military intervention from the beginning of the current protest movement (even though this intervention would not have materialized were it not for an Arab position that was supportive of the revolution). These stances drew a great deal of criticism, especially for their lack of appreciation for the supportive Arab position, and their lack of real connection to the actual revolutionaries in Libya, a connection that could have been invested towards building their capacities, arming and training them. Also clear was the clash between these currents and the Islamic movements. There was an obvious attempt to exclude the Islamic groups from membership in the Transitional National Council under the pretext of not alienating the West, as if to rebut rumors that the revolution was being led by the Islamists of al-Qaeda.

In attempting to assess the trajectory of events in Libya, it seems clear that Gaddafi's maintenance of power is now near impossible. The Libyan opposition appears to be in a better position with every passing day, especially with the growing international support exemplified by the international support for the Transitional National Council. The international intervention may, however, have a negative impact if it escalates into the entry of ground troops. Such a step would signal the transformation of the intervention into an occupation—in violation of Security Council Resolution 1973 that prohibits such an occupation of Libyan territory—also prompting a shift in Libyan public opinion towards resistance against the occupation. As such, Libyans are more likely to change the regime if the intervention is able to weaken the military capacity of the Gaddafi regime. In this case, the Libyan political forces will be able to lay the foundations for a competitive political system as a means of maintaining a balance between themselves that enables the resolution of differences by peaceful means and through the ballot box. The democratic process in Libya may be subject to distortion as a result of internal considerations imposed by the pragmatism of Libyan political forces in response to external conditions. The foundations exist for the success of the Libyan experiment in balancing Libyan national interests with international interests for the following reasons:

- The international competition in Africa is not "zero-sum," and it is possible to share the spoils. The London meeting to discuss NATO intervention and to reach a road map for Libya comes within this context;

- The real possibility of reaching an agreement on the issue of energy resources to ensure moderate oil prices and to preserve Libya's energy resource security will serve common interests;
- The external intervention in the case of Libya is not a direct military intervention on Libyan territory, restricting the external actors from imposing substantial restrictions on any future Libyan government;
- The extension of revolutions throughout the Arab world does not allow the internal and foreign forces to have a monopoly on the democratic process or to impose excessive conditions on other political currents, especially in light of the Iraqi uprising against the discriminatory quota system;

Any doubt regarding the Arab character of the country, or reliance on augmented Western intervention that comes at the expense of self-reliance and self-organization in the war, will affect the legitimacy of the Transitional National Council, opening the floodgates before a tide of potential tribal divisions in a petroleum-rich country already haunted by the specter of foreign influence, as was the case with Iraq.

The Transitional National Council may succeed in becoming the party best suited to form the next Libyan political system, but this is contingent on its ability to conduct the needed logistical and military operations, the coordination with the fighters—including Islamists, the involvement of the Western Regions in the liberation process, steering clear of dependency on the external forces, and the ability to overcome political tribalism while manifesting a true commitment to democracy. These are the factors that will determine the trust of the Libyans, as well as the international forces, together with its capacity and ability to subsequently run the country during the transitional period.