



THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND LIBYA THE NECESSITY FOR ENGAGEMENT

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PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP has signaled that except in the counterterrorism arena, the United States will play less of a role in Libya than did the Obama administration. He made this point clear in an April 20 press conference with Italian prime minister Paolo Gentiloni: “I do not see a role in Libya. I think the United States has, right now, enough roles.”

While Libya will never top the U.S. foreign policy agenda, the country’s fate remains important for American interests in the Mediterranean and broader Middle East. As a result, any U.S. withdrawal from efforts to secure a stable, peaceful Libya would be a mistake.

Since Libya’s 2011 revolution that led to the ouster of Muammar Qadhafi, U.S. engagement with Libya has helped yield important, if impermanent, gains. Violence has been contained from its peak levels in 2014–15; oil exports are up; the Islamic State (IS) was routed and driven from its safe haven in Sirte during the second half of 2016, thanks largely to a sustained U.S. air campaign; and the continued presence of a UN-backed unity government gives the disparate factions an incentive to talk



rather than fight. Moreover, other regional states, including Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Russia, have indicated their clear preference for one side in Libya's political conflict: the easterners, led by Gen. Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA). If the United States steps back from its political role in Libya, the resulting vacuum will likely be filled by Haftar and his international sponsors. That prospect would almost certainly renew a violent civil war, likely topple the fragile UN-sponsored unity government, and pave the way for an IS resurgence.

A comparatively positive case can also be made for continuing or increasing U.S. engagement in Libya. To begin with, a more stable Libya would help secure Europe's southern flank from a widening migration crisis, which could see additional IS, jihadist, and criminal groups infiltrating the continent. A more stable Libya could mitigate neighboring Tunisia's struggles with extremism, since the perpetrators of many terror attacks were trained in Libya. And a more stable Libya could return to being a consistent supplier of oil and gas to Europe, which would allow Libyans to rebuild their country. But absent aggressive U.S. counterterrorism actions and engagement in or coordination with the UN peace process, these potential benefits dwindle. Washington's European partners are not strong or influential enough on their own to guide developments in Libya, particularly as they focus on the future of the European Union and Russian influence on NATO's borders.

This paper draws on Libya's post-revolutionary history and lessons from the Obama administration's experiences with the country—experiences in which the author was personally involved from 2011 to 2013 while serving on the National Security Council. It addresses the fundamental issues facing Libya—politics and diplomacy, security and counterterrorism, economics and assistance—to underscore the influence of U.S. leadership on Libya's future.

Political Divisions, Diplomatic Antagonism

In the early months following Muammar Qadhafi's demise in October 2011, Libyans were largely euphoric

about their newly earned freedoms. Unfortunately, it took only six months for political divisions to emerge, exacerbated by outside actors seeking to advance their own interests by exploiting Libya's transition.

Since Qadhafi's fall, Libya has had as many as five interim governments, depending on how one counts. Three such governments currently claim legitimacy: (1) the Government of National Accord (GNA)—the lone government recognized by the international community; (2) a government headed by Abdullah al-Thini and technically the antecedent body to the GNA; and (3) a self-declared government headed by Khalifa Ghwell, a former member of a prior, Tripoli-based parliament. These disparate claims to power illustrate several fault lines that emerged after Libya's revolution, including those related to regional and local power dynamics, ideological and religious disputes, the ways in which various actors define their roles in the revolution, and these actors' relative willingness to incorporate former regime members and military officers into future governments.

Two primary military coalitions continue to divide Libya: in the east, Haftar's LNA, which comprises much of Operation Dignity; and, centered in Misratah, the grouping of militias that constituted Operation Dawn. For now, the Misratans are loosely aligned with the GNA, but through much of 2014–15, the civil war that pitted Dignity against Dawn cast doubt on prospects for a peaceful political transition.¹ In 2015, Bernardino León, who then led the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), sought to forge a political agreement to halt the violence and chart a new path forward. In collaboration with a Libyan dialogue committee, the UN formulated a complicated system to give most factions a say in the future transition. The UN proposed a Government of National Accord headed by a Presidency Council and backed by the House of Representatives (HoR) legislature elected in 2014. Additionally, it created an ill-defined advisory body, the State Council, from the previous legislature, the General National Congress (GNC).

Although the UN-negotiated deal, known as the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), managed to stop most of the day-to-day violence by late 2015, it was imperfectly structured and did not secure universal

support among Libyans themselves. Nevertheless, judging that such a deal might be impossible to achieve, many Libyans, as well as the UN and Western diplomats, preferred to move forward with some basis for a government rather than hold out for a deal acceptable to all parties.²

In December 2015, as articulated in UN Security Council Resolution 2259, the international community recognized the GNA as Libya's only legitimate government. In January 2016, the HoR approved the LPA, although it rejected the provision that placed the military under civilian control. In a separate vote, the HoR rejected a cabinet proposed by the GNA's Presidency Council. Meanwhile, Haftar and his allies in the HoR sought to keep the general's role independent of the GNA and its Presidency Council. Until today, Haftar's role and the approval of a cabinet remain the most divisive political issues facing the country.

Martin Kobler, the UN envoy who replaced León, spent most of 2016 trying to bring the major players to some consensus. This required intensive efforts to press the HoR to approve the government proposed by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, who moved from Tunisia to Tripoli that April. HoR speaker Aguila Saleh and other political allies of Haftar proved to be the main obstacles, with the HoR objecting to two government slates proposed by Sarraj and preventing several quorum votes on key matters. The eastern leadership did so despite U.S. and EU sanctions against "spoilers" of the Libyan government-formation process, including Saleh himself.

As of May 2017, the GNA and the LNA-HoR alliance are seemingly no closer to agreement than they were a year ago. This is the case despite multiple efforts by regional actors to bring the parties together. In early May 2017, for example, the UAE brokered the first direct meeting between Haftar and Sarraj, but each party released conflicting details of what was purportedly agreed; Sarraj has come under attack among his supporters for even attending the meeting. Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia have also hosted occasional negotiation sessions, but to no avail. Most recently, Russia has played a more active role, seeing a decline in U.S. engagement as an opportunity to exploit the situation. But Russia remains an

unlikely broker, given its historic support for Qadhafi, its recent backing of Haftar, and its pro-Egypt and ardently anti-Islamist stance.

Complicating matters further is the array of international actors with competing interests who have intervened to various degrees in Libya, often exacerbating divisions:

- Since 2011, Egypt and the UAE have tilted strongly toward the former Qadhafi military class and against the Islamist militias that emerged during the revolution. As Libya's civil war played out, these countries correspondingly indicated support for Haftar, including, at one point in 2014, participation in airstrikes on Tripoli against Operation Dawn. Egyptian president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and his Emirati patrons seem convinced that a neo-Qadhafi strongman is the best option for addressing Libya's national crisis, especially for protecting the border with Egypt. They are also attracted to Haftar's rhetoric targeting the Muslim Brotherhood, other Islamists, and jihadists, although Haftar conspicuously avoided combat against IS in Sirte throughout 2016.³

In contrast, Qatar and Turkey supported the Islamist militias during the revolution and the Islamist-leaning Operation Dawn in 2014. But Turkey has since been consumed by internal affairs and the Syrian conflict, and Qatar has scaled back its official involvement partly in response to diplomatic engagement. Still, individual Qatar-based donors are widely suspected of maintaining close ties with the harder-line Libyan Islamists championed by Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani, who enjoys a platform on Qatari media and has relationships with former jihadists. Nor can one exclude the risk that as more support flows into the Haftar camp, the Qataris or Qatar-based individual donors will respond in kind.

- Among the main European actors in Libya (e.g., Britain, France, and Germany), Italy has sought to play a leading role because of its geographic proximity, energy dependence (Italy's Eni is Libya's largest foreign energy company), historic ties, and interest in lessening risks associated with terrorism and migration. Since 2014, when most of the international com-

munity evacuated Libya in response to the violence, Italy has been the only European country to reopen its embassy in Tripoli. During the Sirte operations, Italy established a field hospital in Misratah to treat wounded combatants and deployed forces to secure personnel. Italy has indicated it would be willing to take on broader missions if asked by the GNA. The French and British have also provided security assistance, and their Tunis-based ambassadors actively support Kobler's diplomacy, making frequent trips to Libya.

- As already noted, Russia increased its Libya involvement in 2016 after sensing an opportunity to expand its influence on Europe's southern flank. Haftar visited Moscow on several occasions in 2016 and was hosted aboard a Russian aircraft carrier in January 2017. The substance of those discussions remains unclear, but press reports indicate that Russian security contractors are already assisting Haftar's forces. Saleh has said he expects Russian security assistance.⁴ In recent months, Sarraj, as well as a delegation from Misratah, has also visited Moscow.

In a March 2017 congressional hearing, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser expressed concern about Russia's involvement in Libya. He compared Russia's actions to the Kremlin's meddling in Syria, implying that Russian objectives in Libya would counter American aims to support a stable, pro-Western government. Like Egypt and the UAE, Russia appears to believe that Haftar can secure control of the country and likely renew Russia's extensive weapons sales from the Qadhafi era. The extent of Russian actual or planned materiel involvement in Libya remains unclear, but Russia evidently sees expansion of its influence in the southern Mediterranean as a way to challenge NATO in its backyard, just as it views NATO expansion into Eastern Europe as an infringement on its historic empire.

Given the apparent stalemate in Libya's political process and the variety of actors with competing stakes in the country's future, the Trump administration would be wise to express a clear commitment to the UN-led

peace process. The longer the United States remains inactive on Libya, the longer other players will have an opportunity to take control of the agenda, thereby reducing the likelihood of broader stability.

NEXT STEPS

The Trump administration can help break the current political stalemate by making clear that it will be engaged in Libya and will back the UN and its European partners. The administration should state clearly that it supports the objective of a Libyan-led peace process based on the already-approved LPA, with the aim of creating a unified Libya free of terrorism and capable of benefiting from its natural resources.

Until it has engaged thoroughly with the key stakeholders, particularly the Libyans, the administration could support certain key principles while leaving the substantive elements for a later overarching deal. These principles should include the following:

1. The UN-facilitated process should be the sole negotiating vehicle, and the LPA should be the sole political framework. Any state-sponsored talks outside the UN framework should involve UN representatives in order to ensure common goals and coherence.
2. No single actor in Libya can dominate the country, whether Haftar or the al-Bunyan al-Marsous (BAM) militias from Misratah.⁵
3. Any unilateral support by an outside party to an individual faction separate from the LPA framework and not recognized by the UN Security Council runs counter to Libya's stability.
4. Sanctions targeting "spoilers" of the Libyan political process will remain in place, and new sanctions will be proposed in cooperation with Washington's European partners if key individuals continue to obstruct the LPA talks.
5. All sides recognize that the Presidency Council was never intended to be an administrative body, so the cabinet must be approved to execute critical functions of state. Therefore, the HoR should move forward with a vote on a GNA-proposed cabinet.

In espousing these principles, the Trump administration should take the important step of urging Sunni Arab states—who want to maintain a constructive relationship with the new White House—to also align with these principles. The Sunni states should likewise press the HoR to vote on a cabinet and help resolve the dilemma of including Haftar in the political process. Indeed, Haftar, along with his allies, may be more amenable to some compromise role if he realizes he cannot count on neither U.S. apathy nor support from the Gulf states should he attempt military expansion in the west.

Finally, the Trump administration must designate a point person for Libya. This does not necessarily require the appointment of a special envoy—a position the current administration has been cutting back. An empowered U.S. ambassador to Libya together with senior State Department and White House officials, for example, could make an effective team.

Counterterrorism and Security Challenges

If any argument could sway the Trump administration to become more involved in Libya, it would likely relate to the country's connection to the fight against the Islamic State. Indeed, Trump said in his April 20 press conference with Prime Minister Gentiloni, the same conference at which he disavowed a potential U.S. role in Libya, "We are effectively ridding the world of ISIS. I see that as a primary role, and that's what we're going to do, whether it's in Iraq or in Libya or anywhere else." Yet, as the previous section argues, Libya's security and terrorism vulnerabilities are intimately connected to the country's political circumstances. In turn, understanding the links between these political and security challenges is pivotal to establishing a more comprehensive and effective approach to Libya.

The story begins in late 2014, when IS began sending operatives to Libya in an effort to expand its so-called caliphate beyond Syria and Iraq. Through its propaganda outlets, IS encouraged recruits to travel to Libya. Initially, these recruits received a cold shoulder from competing jihadists in the eastern city

of Darnah, which had long been a hotbed of home-grown jihadist opposition to Qadhafi. After suffering a defeat at the hands of these Darnah militias in April 2016, IS directed its attention to Sirte, Qadhafi's tribal home, which suffered some of the worst damage during the 2011 revolution and hosted the last wave of fighting. IS fighters, aided by disaffected Qadhafi allies, soon evicted competing militias from Misratah, the city closest to Sirte, and imposed the same interpretation of Islamic law witnessed in Raqqa and Mosul.

Throughout 2015 and into 2016, the Islamic State's presence in Sirte became especially worrisome to the counter-IS coalition as it became clear that local Libyan forces lacked the ability to defeat the group on their own, largely because Haftar and the Misratan militias were busy fighting each other. The formation of the GNA in early 2016 enabled Western powers to expand counterterrorism cooperation with and assistance to Libyan authorities. They could now partner with local forces to ensure any air campaign was matched by on-the-ground efforts aimed at recapturing and holding territory after airstrikes were completed. On its own, in June 2016, the BAM militia coalition in Misratah initially succeeded in driving IS forces back from the coastline around Sirte. When the fighting transitioned to urban areas, though, the coalition got bogged down, suffering significant casualties from snipers and improvised explosive devices. The United States, on August 1, 2016, launched Operation Odyssey Lightning in support of GNA-aligned forces. According to a U.S. spokesperson, the "precision" strikes on IS targets were consistent with the overall U.S. approach to countering the jihadist group by supporting "capable and motivated local partners."⁶ U.S. assistance also allowed the GNA to build credibility since the fragile government served as the vehicle for delivering much-needed air support to the Misratan militias. Furthermore, a request from the GNA provided a legal authorization for U.S. involvement.

The victory in Sirte—a combination of BAM efforts⁷ and nearly five hundred U.S. airstrikes⁸—amounted to a rare bright spot for Libya's stability. At the beginning of 2016, U.S. intelligence officials publicly estimated that up to five thousand IS fighters were present in

Libya. The current estimates, reflecting IS losses in Sirte, are closer to two to three hundred fighters, who have dispersed mainly in the country's vast southern desert. The United States has maintained some level of intelligence on their status, as evidenced by a January 18, 2017, airstrike south of Sirte that killed more than eighty IS fighters.⁹ Yet, as AFRICOM commander Waldhauser testified to the Senate Committee on Armed Services in March 2017, "Even with the success of Sirte, ISIS-Libya remains a regional threat with intent to target U.S. persons and interests."¹⁰

Even before the anti-IS campaign that began in August 2016, the United States had already acted decisively on counterterrorism matters in Libya. In January 2014, U.S. Special Forces captured Anas al-Libi, a leading al-Qaeda figure during the group's formative years who was wanted for his role in planning the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. Libi, who was captured outside his Tripoli home, was transported back to the United States but died in 2015 of a pre-existing illness before his trial began. Special Forces also captured Ahmed Abu Khattala, a member of Ansar al-Sharia, for helping lead the September 2012 attack against the U.S. special mission in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. Khattala is awaiting trial in a federal prison in Virginia. Additionally, the United States carried out two significant airstrikes before the Sirte campaign: In June 2015, a strike killed several militants outside Benghazi, with the Pentagon confirming the target to be the North African jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who had perpetrated the 2013 attack against an Algerian gas plant. Belmokhtar's death has not been confirmed. And in February 2016, U.S. bombers attacked an IS camp in Sabratha reportedly responsible for training the perpetrator of the deadly June 2015 terrorist attack at a beach resort in Sousse, Tunisia.

NEXT STEPS

To face the continuing terrorism threats in Libya, the United States will need to both expand its intelligence collection and work with its European partners to help Libya build capable and credible security forces.

The success of the U.S. counterterrorism mission in Libya hinges on the level of forces allocated to

AFRICOM to conduct CT operations. Unfortunately, AFRICOM is perpetually underresourced, with most operational resources provided on a temporary basis from other theaters. In contrast, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets are consistently prioritized in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. If the Trump administration seeks to elevate its commitment to the CT mission in Libya, it can start by providing additional permanent military and intelligence assets to AFRICOM so that the mission can build on the progress made during the Sirte campaign.¹¹ U.S. officials can also work from existing relationships with France, which has a presence in countries such as Niger and Mali.

Just as the United States and its partners need enhanced ISR to better identify and assess the strength of CT targets, they also need reliable local partners—consistent with the broader counter-IS strategy—to clear and hold territory as well as help protect Libya's government and critical infrastructure. Here, much can be learned from failed past efforts to train Libyan security forces in Britain, Italy, and Jordan. Such debacles included cases in which Libyan trainees damaged facilities and even, in Britain, were implicated in sexual assaults. On Libyan soil, one dedicated program to train elite forces ended in disaster when, in August 2013, those forces lost control of their base and their weapons to another militia.¹² To prevent a recurrence of such incidents, vetting standards must be improved. Moreover, basic training should occur in Libya or neighboring states, with only specialized or officer training taking place in Europe for already proven and committed candidates.

The best option for building durable Libyan security forces may be to revive a proposal initially explored by NATO in 2013 to help convert the country's militias into specially trained National Guard units. According to this concept, Libyans are more likely to be loyal to commanders with local authority and legitimacy rather than to a national army. Indeed, such a concept should be revived and explored in the context of Libya's current political struggles. Training would be contingent on several commitments by the Libyans themselves, including: limiting deployments to barracks located outside major cities; storing weapons in

secure, centralized locations, perhaps under international supervision; and establishing a command structure that subordinates the units to civilian authority.

Integrating this effort with a political approach will, however, be critical. If a renewed training effort conducted by the United States or Italy focuses only on the Misratan militias, which earned respect from these Western powers for their role in the 2016 anti-IS campaign, divisions within the GNA will be reinforced, likely bleeding over into the political process. This dilemma has no easy answers and involves many hazards. Inaction, for example, could increase the potential that IS will regroup. Exclusive training of the BAM, meanwhile, raises the risks of antagonizing Haftar, provoking civil war, and most troubling, giving Russia a reason to support Haftar and the LNA overtly. Yet if the United States waits for the political process to stabilize on its own, it may never have an opportunity to provide the necessary training. Finally, if negotiators cannot forge a compromise solution to the GNA-Haftar conflict in the short term, the approach to training Libyan forces must include either of the following: (1) another means of achieving geographic balance, perhaps through the concept of a national guard, or (2) a public but contingent offer of training for eastern forces in the event a resolution is reached. For now, absent broader political progress, the nascent effort to train a Presidential Guard aligned with the Presidential Council will quickly run into the challenges just outlined.

Stabilizing Libya's Economy

Underlying the political and security conflicts just described is a complex set of economic challenges that are intertwined with Libya's future stability. The GNA, or any prospective Libyan government, will struggle to survive unless it can raise revenue from increased oil exports and spend the country's oil wealth to deliver services and rebuild the country. To date, successive Libyan governments have remained vulnerable to physical seizures of oil infrastructure or political gridlock that has hobbled the country's financial institutions and stimulated a dangerous black-market economy that contributes to criminal-

ity. These challenges, which do not receive enough attention, can either undermine or help secure any potential political agreement.

As with many other countries, Libya's greatest asset, oil, is also its ongoing curse. During his tenure, Qadhafi's control of the energy-rich state allowed him to dominate all aspects of the economy. He employed the vast majority of the population through public-sector positions and, when necessary, bought off tribes to secure loyalty among potential opponents. When the price of oil skyrocketed, Libya accumulated more than \$110 billion in foreign currency reserves and, in 2006, created a sovereign wealth fund known as the Libyan Investment Authority, with a range of global assets and holdings.¹³ However, the revolution and subsequent political turmoil left Libya with a massive budget deficit amounting in 2015 to 75 percent of GDP, which the Central Bank funded through its reserves. The World Bank estimated that, by the end of 2015, the reserves had fallen to \$56 billion.¹⁴

Under Qadhafi, Libyans came to expect not only public-sector jobs but also subsidies, including very low fuel prices. In 2012, after Qadhafi had fallen, interim president Muhammad Yousif al-Magariaf exacerbated the problem when he authorized national salary payments to militias in exchange for nominal loyalty. As a result, public salary expenditures rose by more than 70 percent from 2011 to 2013 and constituted nearly 60 percent of GDP by 2015.¹⁵ This not only added to the public payroll thousands of militia members, many of whom had not actually fought in the revolution or who were drawing salaries based on multiple affiliations, but effectively legitimized these forces so that the government had no control over their deployments or their weapons. Any time militias subsequently opposed a government proposal, they needed only to raid an office to make their point. Most egregiously, Islamist-leaning militia members surrounded the parliament in 2013 to force a vote on a poorly understood bill prohibiting Qadhafi-era officials from serving in future governments.

In one of the most significant achievements of the post-revolutionary period, oil production was restored to over 1 million barrels per day (from a prewar high

of 1.6 mbd) by mid-2012, despite the wartime damage done to pipelines, storage terminals, and ports. Unfortunately, as tensions between militias grew through 2014–15, production and exports returned to nearly zero, especially due to fighting surrounding the main oil crescent. By late 2016, oil production had rebounded to 700,000 barrels per day. In the interim, total oil revenues overall have decreased by \$160 billion since 2013.¹⁶ The political fluidity and constantly changing control of the fields and export facilities place Libya's main source of income in perpetual flux.

In addition to these security problems, Libya's political and bureaucratic deadlock has largely prevented the emergence of a budget development and implementation process. This problem is rooted in a continuing debate about political authority. Each transitional legislative body (the National Transitional Council, the GNC, and the HoR) has claimed authority over budget development. Consequently, government ministries with nominal responsibility for running government services and projects have been deprived of funds other than by ad hoc arrangements. The vast majority of the budget goes toward salary payments, subsidies, and expenses.

In the fall of 2016, the international community, with U.S. leadership, helped convene technical meetings with Libya's key economic institutions to develop a so-called temporary financial arrangement (TFA) aimed at enabling budget execution for the end of 2016 and 2017. As a result of these meetings and follow-up efforts, the Presidency Council is now cooperating with the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, and the Audit Bureau—an important body that hindered agreement on previous expenditures—to implement an agreed budget with clearly identified financial constraints. To be sure, the TFA highlights Libya's economic problems: 73 percent of expenditures, as intimated earlier, go to salaries and subsidies, whereas just 5 percent goes to non-oil-sector development projects, despite the desperate need for repairs to the country's basic infrastructure. Nevertheless, this basic agreement on public spending is far superior to continuing deadlock and underscores the need for persistent, quiet U.S. engagement on these pivotal issues.

GNA's 2017 Temporary Financial Arrangement in billions LD

State-sector salaries	20.74
Subsidies	6.32
Operating costs	5.06
Development	4.0 (50% for oil sector)
Actual total	36.12
Total announced by GNA	37.56
Difference unaccounted for	1.44

NOTE: Official exchange rate on April 26, 2017, was 1 USD to 1.4 LD, but the black market price for foreign currency is much higher.
SOURCE: GNA/*Libya Herald*¹⁷

Another significant challenge for Libya's economy is a liquidity crisis, which has stimulated a black market economy whose unofficial exchange rate is as high as 10–12 Libyan dinars to 1 U.S. dollar, as opposed to the official exchange rate of 1.4 dinars to the dollar. As Libya's Central Bank chairman, Sadek al-Kabir, explained in April 2017, "Large depositors withdrew their funds and are hoarding and recycling them outside the banking system, to the amount of LD 30 billion. This exceeded 70 percent of GDP whereas it did not exceed 9% at the end of 2010."¹⁸ The situation has spurred smuggling, especially of subsidized oil, which only encourages further criminality.¹⁹

The Role for Targeted U.S. Development Assistance

In 2011, when Libya's transition began, the United States provided approximately \$118 million in economic assistance.²⁰ These funds were mainly channeled through international organizations for humanitarian relief and supporting refugees, in addition to specific State and Defense Department programs to address destruction of chemical weapons and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), of which the Qadhafi regime had accumulated thousands.

U.S. assistance has dropped significantly since 2011, in part because Congress did not support assistance to an oil-rich country, but also because

the Libyans could not organize or implement projects effectively. In fiscal year 2015, just \$15 million was allocated, mainly to support various small programs related to governance, future election support, and the constitution-drafting process, in addition to almost \$6 million to the Red Cross and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (By comparison, the EU currently has a planned package of 120 million euros—equivalent to about \$131 million in May 2017—not counting the bilateral programs carried out by member states). Whereas the U.S. Agency for International Development had a presence in Libya even before the U.S. embassy was reestablished in early 2012, the embassy's 2014 evacuation has forced the USAID mission to rely exclusively on local staff and implementers. Some additional funds were identified and allocated to support securing and rebuilding Sirte after the IS withdrawal, but implementation of these projects stalled in early 2017.

NEXT STEPS

Given the Trump administration's stated aversion to foreign aid and its proposed budget cuts to foreign assistance and funding of international agencies, any such spending on Libya will face particular scrutiny. Yet a compelling case can be made for why certain specialized programs must be preserved and why Europe should take over others, such as support for civil society. For example, continuing the relatively small investments in strengthening and training Libya's nascent municipal governments will contribute to the country's longer-term stability. Further, if Washington expects others to provide the majority of assistance, it has to be willing to defray some share of the burden.

Separately, building on initial positive meetings, the president and his team should seek funds from the Gulf states for key development projects. Such program-specific work should be coordinated with UNSMIL and the UN Development Programme, drawing on these agencies' expertise in identifying short-term, high-impact projects, specifically in Libya.

The migration crisis offers another case for U.S. involvement. Given the related threats to U.S.

security, Washington cannot leave Europe to deal with this situation alone. Indeed, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that in 2016, some 1,300 migrants originating in North Africa died at sea, most of them from Libya.²¹ Setting aside the humanitarian component, unchecked migration can empower criminal networks, some of them with ties to terrorism. A December 2016 UN report on the topic noted that groups aligned with IS are reportedly "involved in abduction and abuse of migrants in Libya."²² At a minimum, the United States should continue supporting the IOM's work in Libya and consider participating in the EU's Operation Sophia, a mission to rescue migrants, intercept illegal traffickers, and train local forces in North Africa.²³

Policy Recommendations

U.S. engagement in Libya's political, security, and economic challenges is essential to help stabilize the North African country as well as to advance American interests in the region. Moreover, without Washington's weight, the Europeans alone are simply not influential enough to compel Libya's political factions to come together to form a functional unity government. And supporting Gen. Khalifa Haftar, as the Egyptians and Russians prefer, is a recipe for renewed civil war and increased Russian influence in the southern Mediterranean. This is why the United States must make a renewed push to support the UN-facilitated Libyan dialogue and secure a compromise between the HoR/LNA and the GNA.

Viewing the crisis in Libya solely through the lens of counterterrorism offers only a band-aid for the deeper wounds infecting post-Qadhafi Libya. Periodic airstrikes against terrorist camps without a dedicated effort to bring Libya's factions together into some agreed form of governance is a recipe for ongoing instability. Moreover, it could serve to deepen American long-term military engagement in North Africa. AFRICOM's posture statement put it well: "We must also continue to promote development of responsive and effective governance and ensure the rights of all Libyans are respected. These are foundational to

long-term regional security.” Further, a singular focus on counterterrorism would make it harder to corral local forces in the fight against IS, given that such forces will be reluctant to risk casualties if they fear they will only be weakened for future clashes with internal rivals.

In order to address Libya’s challenges most effectively, the Trump administration should pursue the following lines of effort:

SUPPORT THE POLITICAL PROCESS

- Deliver a clear statement supporting UN and European diplomatic efforts to mediate a solution that maximizes prospects for Libya’s stability.
- Demonstrate a U.S. commitment by resuming the State Department’s high-level engagement on Libya. This does not require the appointment of a special envoy, but the White House or State Department must designate an empowered point person for Libya policy.
- To signal its reengagement with Libya policy, the United States should establish guiding principles vital to breaking the deadlock in the peace talks (based on the five rough principles outlined earlier).

ENLIST OUTSIDE ACTORS

- Take advantage of Washington’s improved relationship with the Sunni Arab states to press them to openly support the UN-led political process. This could be the administration’s most significant contribution to breaking the political logjam because, together with U.S. engagement, such support would weaken Haftar’s position and could persuade him to accept a dominant role in the east—although one under GNA authority—especially if tied to a generous sinecure.
- Make the case diplomatically that outside actors must adhere to common principles on supporting Libyan unity through a single negotiation process. Here, President Trump’s use of the bully/Twitter pulpit may prove more effective than the Obama administration’s reliance on quiet diplomacy, which was frequently ignored.

- Work with UN secretary-general António Guterres to appoint a strong and qualified UN envoy to replace Martin Kobler. Two such prospects have already been rejected, including the highly respected former Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad.²⁴ Further, encourage Guterres to become personally involved with the Libyan governance crisis.

ADDRESS SECURITY AND CT ISSUES

- Intervene militarily when necessary against the Islamic State and other extremists, as occurred in 2016 in Sirte and, before that, through the precision bombings in 2015–16 and targeted capture operations in 2013–14.
- Dedicate additional ISR assets to U.S. Africa Command to improve collection in and around Libya. Consider meeting additional AFRICOM stated force requirements, such as a dedicated Afloat Forward Staging Base, which was essential to the successful operation in Sirte.
- Form a coalition with European partners to help train Libyan security forces, including by exploring the renewal of a 2013 NATO concept to train locally based National Guard elements to minimize disparities between one faction and another.
- In developing security assistance programs in Libya, focus on effective vetting of candidates, a shortfall of previous such programs. Indeed, these programs are essential if Libya is ever to experience stability. And should the United States and Europe ignore this challenge, the Russians will eventually step in and focus their training on Haftar’s LNA, provoking even greater animosity and capabilities gaps between the country’s eastern and western power centers.

MAINTAIN ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

- Despite its instincts against nation-building initiatives and foreign assistance, the Trump administration should identify areas where the United States provides unique development assistance in Libya and has built effective on-the-ground relationships through these programs. It can then transi-

tion remaining programs to other donors, as possible. Here, President Trump may be able to exert pressure on the Gulf states to sponsor particular projects, but making the case that such efforts are critical to Libya's stability is difficult if the United States contributes nothing.

- Maintain engagement with Libya's financial institutions and their key personalities in order to provide technical advice, and with the political players who helped produce the temporary financial arrangement. Addressing the broader liquidity crisis and surging black market economy will be impossible without more sustained political progress, reinforcing the need for U.S. political engagement.

GET BACK ON THE GROUND

- Finally, the administration should build on the May 23 visit to Tripoli by U.S. ambassador to Libya Peter Bodde and Africom commander Gen. Thomas Waldhauser—the first time U.S. officials have visited Tripoli since 2014—to reengage across Libya's political spectrum. The UN and all the major European ambassadors visit Libya, and in January 2017 the Italians reopened their embassy in Tripoli. Visits are not just symbolic but can also allow for substantive exchange, given the value of meeting Libyan hosts on their own turf.

Conclusion

Donald Trump has shown that he can evolve from his instinctive approaches on significant foreign policy issues, such as the utility of the NATO alliance, the U.S. economic relationship with China, and the merits of Russian president Vladimir Putin. Trump's staff now has an opportunity to educate the president on why Libya matters for North African and Mediterranean security, and why a counterterrorism approach alone is insufficient to address Libya's persistent instability. Secretaries Rex Tillerson and James Mattis have a special responsibility to make the case for why Libya's stability impacts U.S. national security interests and those of our closest allies.

Trump's first foreign trip, which includes meetings with the GCC, NATO, and the G7, provides an important opportunity to address the U.S. role in Libya in public. If he joins his G7 counterparts in endorsing the UN political process and articulates his backing for the UN-backed GNA, such a stance could encourage Libya's domestic adversaries (and their external backers) to engage in further talks. But if the president ignores Libya or, worse, reiterates his lack of support for a U.S. diplomatic role there, the likelihood of further instability will accelerate and the Russians will almost certainly continue expanding their role in North Africa.

Notes

1. The roots of the 2014–15 civil war run deeper than the 2011 revolution. Operation Dignity coalesced as a movement led by Haftar who took advantage of the lack of security in Benghazi and the targeted assassination campaign against former regime security officials to rally many former officers around him. In February 2014, Haftar declared war on all Islamists, not distinguishing between nonviolent Muslim Brotherhood members and hardened jihadists, Ansar-Sharia, and eventually the Islamic State. Since Haftar's core followers consisted of former Qadhafi officers, they were already viewed with extreme suspicion by the Islamist militias, some of whose members had previously been persecuted, tortured, and executed by these former security officers. From the perspective of the militias (only the most extreme of which perpetrated the assassinations), Haftar represented a neo-Qadhafi autocrat who did not even fight in the most intense battle during the revolution, in Misratah. That division between the so-called real revolutionaries and former Qadhafi officials and officers constitutes one of the key drivers of Libya's ongoing conflict, specifically regarding Haftar's prospective role in a future government.
2. An excellent summary of the major actors in Libya is available from the European Council on Foreign Relations: "A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players," http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict.
3. They have also ignored a tactical alliance established by the LNA with the Madkhali Salafists, who are rivals of the Ansar al-Sharia jihadists based in Benghazi.

4. Maria Tsvetkova, "Exclusive: Russian Private Security Firm Says It Had Armed Men in East Libya," Reuters, March 13, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-contractors-idUSKBN16H2DM>; Alec Luhn, "Russian Special Forces Sent to Back Renegade Libyan General—Reports," *Guardian*, March 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/14/russian-special-forces-deployed-in-egypt-near-libyan-border-report>.
5. With enough outside support, Haftar could conceivably launch an offensive against western Libya, but he would certainly face intense resistance, leading to heavy casualties among combatants and civilians alike. The resulting fight could also spark an IS resurgence and radicalize additional Libyans, just as Qadhafi's crackdowns in the 1990s helped create the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which eventually aligned with al-Qaeda.
6. Ben Fishman, "The Twin Battle in Libya: Against the Islamic State and for Unity," PolicyWatch 2679, August 23, 2016, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-twin-battle-in-libya-against-the-islamic-state-and-for-unity>; "Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on US Air Strike in Libya" <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/881794/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-us-air-strike-in-libya/>
7. BAM reported suffering 720 deaths in the campaign, disadvantaging them in any future conflict with Haftar's LNA. See Sami Zaptia, "A Total of 1,523 Violent Deaths Were Reported in Libya in 2015: Libyanbodycount," *Libya Herald*, January 5, 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/05/a-total-of-1523-violent-deaths-were-reported-in-libya-in-2016-libyanbodycount/>.
8. U.S. Africa Command, "AFRICOM Concludes Operation Odyssey Lightning," press release, December 20, 2016, <http://www.africom.mil/media-room/pressrelease/28564/africom-concludes-operation-odyssey-lightning>.
9. Terri Moon Cronk, "U.S. Airstrikes Kill 80 ISIL Fighters in Libya, Carter Says," U.S. Department of Defense, January 19, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1054306/us-airstrikes-kill-80-isil-fighters-in-libya-carter-says/>.
10. Eric Schmitt, "Warnings of a 'Powder Keg' in Libya as ISIS Regroups," *New York Times*, March 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/21/world/africa/libya-isis.html?_r=0.
11. AFRICOM's annual force posture statement reports that "only approximately 20–30% of Africa Command's ISR requirements are met." The Sirte operation also included an amphibious-ship capability that served as an Afloat Forward Staging Base. The posture statement indicates that AFRICOM seeks to maintain this capability permanently, which would support maritime-based ISR operations, personnel recovery and casualty evacuation shortfalls, and "additional operations against regional threats." "United States Africa Command 2017 Posture Statement," www.africom.mil/media-room/document/28720/africom-2017-posture-satement.
12. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Training Elite Antiterror Troops in Four African Nations," *New York Times*, May 26, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/world/africa/us-trains-african-commandos-to-fight-terrorism.html>.
13. The Libyan Investment Authority's accounts were frozen by the UN Security Council in 2011 and will remain so until a Libyan government agrees on a manager and further research can be done to determine the scope of its holdings.
14. "Libya's Economic Outlook—Spring 2016," World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/publication/economic-outlook-spring-2016>.
15. Ibid.
16. "Elkaber's Much-Awaited Press Conference Offers No New Solutions," *Libya Herald*, April 23, 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/23/cbl-governor-press-conference-offers-no-new-solutions/>.
17. Sami Zaptia, "The GNA's 2017 'Budget' Is Illegal, Say HoR Members," *Libya Herald*, January 2, 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/02/the-gnas-2017-budget-is-illegal-say-hor-members-an-analysis/>.
18. "Elkaber's Much-Awaited Press Conference," <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/23/cbl-governor-press-conference-offers-no-new-solutions/>.
19. Ibid.
20. "U.S. Aid by Foreign Country: Libya," U.S. Agency for International Development, https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/LBY?measure=Obligations&fiscal_year=2011.
21. Missing Migrants Project, <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/>.

22. "Detained and Dehumanised": Report on Human Rights Abuses against Migrants in Libya (UN Support Mission in Libya/Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, December 13, 2016), http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/LY/DetainedAndDehumanised_en.pdf.
23. "About EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia," January 3, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eunavfor-med/36/about-eunavfor-med-operation-sophia_en.
24. Ben Fishman, "Don't Block Fayyad at the UN," *Foreign Affairs*, February 24, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2017-02-24/dont-block-fayyad-un>.

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