NATO OTAN **Research Report**

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What future for post-Gaddafi Libya?

On 7th December 2011 the NATO Defense College Research Division held a closed seminar entitled "What future for Libya?", bringing together a small group of experts from Europe, Libya and other parts of the Maghreb. The conclusions of this brainstorming session are summarized below:

What are the main challenges for Libya in terms of security and stability?

- **National reconciliation**, since the war has created lasting divisions which go beyond regional and tribal splits. It appears indispensable to move away from a logic based on the balance of power (many young people have acquired a taste for war), in order to promote a civilian and political mindset determined to exclude the militarization which now dominates thinking after a six-month civil war. Strong family structures, together with an ancestral culture of negotiation, should make it possible to achieve this reconciliation. The first big meeting in Zawiya in early December seems to indicate that prospects are good.
- **Disarmanent of militia groups** and/or their integration into security forces representative of the Libyan nation as a whole. This priority presupposes the rebuilding and restructuring of the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior.
- **Resumption of the main public services** (water, electricity, waste collection, reopening of schools and universities, where they are still closed – in particular in Tripolitania).
- **Guaranteeing border security**, to restrict AQIM's potential room for manoeuvre and ensure the safety of foreigners who wish to bring help to Libya.
- **Setting up of a judiciary system** which works and ensures fairness.

- **Building institutions which make it possible for the country to free itself of tribalism**, so as not to relapse into the aberrations of the past.
- **Redistribution of oil income** on a fair basis (70% of the country's oil is in the east, 80% of the population are in the west).
- **Rebuilding of society**, which has been denied any structure for more than 40 years, in order to re-establish a civil culture marking a break with corruption, nepotism and networks of patronage. The Libyans must take their future in hand and get to work.

What is the electoral timeline for the coming months?

- **By June 2012**: election of a Constituent Assembly which will have six months to draw up a constitution and establish fundamental laws.
- **By late spring 2013**: election of a Parliament and President, and appointment of a legitimately elected representative government.

What are the probable political developments?

- While they have divergent views on many points, the Libyans are unanimous in recognizing that political reforms must not be remote-controlled from outside. Any interventionism, irrespective of where it comes from, would be seen as interference and would immediately trigger off a strong feeling of rejection.
- Libya remains a traditionalist, fundamentally Muslim country, where "lay extremists" (lay progressives) have no real power even if they are motivated and strive to be present on the international media stage. The Islamist movement is today dominated by the Libyan equivalent of the Muslim Brotherhood. The victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Ennahda party in Tunisia and the PJD in Morocco strengthens their grip over local politics. If there were elections, they would be clear winers. The Muslim nationalists are also influential. The Salaafists remain a minority and are not comparable to the AQIM. The influence of Abdelhakim Belhadj, who enjoys the support of Qatar, and of his defenders of the faith (about 300 men) is greatly exaggerated by Al-Jazeera and thus in the Western media. The existence of a strong Muslim Brotherhood party is a major obstacle to the spread of the Salaafist movement.

- Libya is neither Iraq, nor Afghanistan, nor Somalia. The country has no problem of religious sectarianism. The spectre of the crises in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, held up by certain sectors of the media, is not relevant.

- Despite the commonly held view that Libyan political life today is dominated by the tribes, it is actually certain cities and regions which exert the strongest influence:
    - Tripoli, Misratah and Benghazi (the party or faction which manages to control these three cities should have a decisive advantage in the race for power).
    - The Nafusa Mountains, south-west of the capital (this area being the starting point for the offensive which led to the liberation of Tripoli).
    - Zawiya and Zintan.

- The division between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (the western and eastern parts of the country respectively) is still very marked and to a considerable extent transcends areas of tribal influence. The tribes remain a form of social organization lacking any real translation in the political sphere. None of them can command a dominant influence on local politics, even if some experts emphasize the importance of the role played by the Warfalla tribe. The militias are not tribal-based, being formed on a regional or local basis.

- It is very difficult to say today who will dominate Libya tomorrow. It can, however, be stated with certainty that whoever controls oil revenues will control the country. Libya, which has about twenty years of oil reserves (43 billion barrels), will remain a rentier state in the foreseeable future, since a policy of economic diversification always takes time to become operational (at least a decade). This is why it is urgent to review how oil revenues are distributed (who in Libya is authorized to recover the 100 billion dollars held in blocked foreign bank accounts? and in order to spend them on what?), looking for a way to ensure that they are fairly distributed and subject to control mechanisms so that they are not monopolized by a restricted élite. The Canadian model for equal entitlement to revenues from natural wealth among different provinces has been held up as a useful example for the new Libyan authorities to exploit. Without a proactive policy approach of this kind, rivalry to control oil revenues will inevitably lead to fresh violence, as already indicated by the deployment of militia forces at a number of oil facilities.

- Banks (which hold 100 billion dollars of Libyan assets) and the international community have the capacity to play an important role in the process of political reform in Libya. There is, however, the risk that their influence can lead to destabilization if used to re-establish a new form of patronage network facilitating the conclusion of major contracts far removed from the population's needs (nuclear power stations, sophisticated weapons). There would thus be a danger of relapsing into a policy of prestige and an arms race, totally inconsistent with the real expectations of the people.

What type of political organization?

- The hypothesis of a return to a monarchy is neither credible nor consistent with the real situation on the ground. The monarchists kept silent during the civil war and remained abroad. Their legitimacy is practically non-existent.
- The hypothesis of a tribal federation is equally lacking in credibility.
- A strong centralized State is not desirable, because it would reproduce past aberrations and could survive only with the support of a patronage system which would be harmful to Libyan society.
- The most reasonable option, on which many Libyans are in agreement, is a highly devolved, decentralized State which would recognize the specificities of the major regions and even the major cities, setting up a mechanism for distribution of oil wealth. This could (but would not have to) be a federal or confederal State. Once again, the example of Canada was mentioned.
- The Libyans, who have come a long way, are not yet at the stage where they can discuss the merits of a parliamentary, mixed or presidential model. This will be the task of the Constituent Assembly.

Is Libya capable of controlling the whole of its territory?

- Not for the moment, since the army as such no longer exists.
- There is a risk that the new Libyan authorities will limit their control to the coastal area, the cities and the oil fields, which would in practice mean abandoning the deep south to the Tuareg and AQIM.

- The Libyan authorities seem determined to fight AQIM. If the NTC regularly discovers arms caches in the deep south, AQIM probably finds them too.
- For the future, there are two opposing views:
    - Libya must physically guard its borders as a whole, thus justifying an oversized army (some Libyans speak of a force of 100,000 men) which can absorb as many men as possible from the militia forces, at the risk of creating an ineffective military and endangering the stability of the government authorities;
    - Libya is not facing any outside threat and it is impossible to keep effective control over the whole of its land borders, thousands of kilometres long. In this perspective, some are in favour of maintaining a small, well trained army (25,000 to 50,000 men). This would control only major transit points and major nodes for illicit trafficking, working with local internal security forces and maintaining close cooperation with neighbouring States on security matters.
- All participants at the seminar agreed that the Libyan army of tomorrow will not need expensive heavy armaments (tanks, fighter aircraft, large ships), but sophisticated surveillance systems and a response capability consistent with the country's size.
- There was also agreement that priority should not be given to the military part of the reform process, but to the training of civilian leadership groups.

What relations with neighbouring countries?

- Relations with Egypt, though complex, are seen as important and "manageable". There is no doubt that if the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt, relations with Libya would be facilitated.
- Relations with Tunisia are excellent (this being the only country with which Libya has no visa requirements). Libyans are grateful to their Tunisian neighbours for accommodating hundreds of thousands of refugees during the civil war. Many Tunisians see Libya as an Eldorado which can absorb part of their qualified workforce.

- Relations with Algeria are still problematic. Libyans strongly resent the attitude of the Algerian authorities during the civil war. At the same time they are pragmatic and wish to re-establish "workable" relations with Algeria, even if they see Algeria's cultivation of relations with the countries of the Sahel as an attempt to isolate Libya.
- Relations with Sudan and Chad are seen as satisfactory. The government of Chad seems to want Libyans to forget its support for Gaddafi and the presence of Chadian mercenaries among the loyalist forces.
- Relations with Niger are more sensitive. Niger, where one of Gaddafi's sons is staying, is seen as a bridgehead which "sold" itself to the former regime.
- On the whole, there was agreement that the new Libya will no longer turn towards Africa as was the case under the Gaddafi regime, but towards the Arab world. The abuses committed by mercenaries from sub-Saharan Africa during the civil war will not be forgotten quickly.
- Morocco is seen as a potential ally, useful to counterbalance the Algerian government's apparent intention of marginalizing the new Libyan authorities. The collapse of Libyan power would allow Algeria to eliminate an oil competitor and blame the West (which has "accompanied" the regime change in Tripoli), but above all to justify its role as "policeman of the Sahel".

What relations with other regional actors?

- The Libyans have not failed to understand the strategy of Qatar in helping them, the real intention being to transform Libya into a rentier emirate on the south shore of the Mediterranean which would provide a channel of influence for Qatar and the UAE. The Libyans emphasize that they feel profoundly Mediterranean and do not identify with the political model of the Gulf oil monarchies, though they continue for the moment to accept all the financial and material aid provided by Doha and Abu Dhabi. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, seems out of the running.
- If Russia and China are for the moment subject to criticism for supporting the former regime, many Libyans are grateful to them for not vetoing the UN Security Council resolution. The Libyans, who consider themselves pragmatic, seem determined not to estrange Chinese companies, if only for the sake of maintaining a balance in their

future trading partnerships. The Russians, on the other hand, seem to have lost a market which was theirs for a long time.

- As everywhere else on the south side of the Mediterranean, Erdogan's Turkey is seen as a model.
- The Libyans declare fervent support for the Palestinian cause and await the initiative of the West on this question.
- The European Union is seen as a partner of choice to accompany the country's transformation and modernization.

What relations with NATO?

- While NATO has an excellent reputation in Cyrenaica, it is not seen as favourably in Tripolitania and actually has a bad image in the south of the country. Eighty per cent of Libyans have known nothing except the anti-Western rhetoric to which Gaddafi exposed them for forty years, and see NATO as the sword arm of a "Western neo-imperialism".
- NATO made the right choice in ending Operation *Unified Protector* and not engaging on the ground. Any NATO military presence would be seen by a majority of the population as an occupying force.
- NATO is seen as a partner which can help Libya reform its defence capabilities, on condition that the Alliance does not move into Libya to do so. Turkey is seen as having the ideal credentials to provide liaison between NATO and Libya.
- For a certain number of Libyans, their country's possible integration into the Mediterranean Dialogue is seen as an interesting alternative, but only after democratic elections have been held. Any decision about joining the Mediterranean Dialogue taken by an interim government would be considered illegitimate.

How to help Libya along the road to reform?

- By not intervening directly in the country's domestic affairs.
- By helping Libya progress rapidly in terms of education and training of managers, both civilian and military (three quarters of the population are reportedly illiterate).

- By encouraging the creation of associations to promote a culture of difference and dialogue.
- By encouraging a multi-party system – the more political parties there are, the more the militia groups will be able to blend into the local political scene and the less potential damage they can do.
- By creating a fund to facilitate disarmament and retraining of militiamen, for example by offering them the opportunity to train abroad.

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