Views: Libya, Militias, Divisions, and the Way Forward

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There is no simple solution to Libya's problems: institutional divisions prevail within a general context of political void, while the absence of a strong army is fueling the rule of militias. Without a national army, both western and eastern Libya depend on the action of paramilitary actors with conflicting agendas. However, Libya is not doomed to enduring insecurity and instability. When the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) tried to take over Tripoli in the spring of 2019, militias reacted strongly. Despite their divergences, they unified against the LNA. Militias will continue to be reluctant to form a cohesive national military body subordinate to governmental rule; yet there could be some exceptions. Besides, the UN needs to implement a strategy based on Libya's most pressing needs, with the help of actors that include Libya's spoilers.

Eight years after the Arab uprisings, Libya shows no signs of recovering from the plethora of problems in which it became entangled. With the official fall of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011, despite many difficulties, the country could have still headed towards a better future. But disagreements, rivalries, and struggles for power took over, as exemplified by the early April 2019 battle for Tripoli. Currently, Libya is experiencing one of the worst crises in its history, ruled by insecurity, underdevelopment, humanitarian crises, trafficking of all sorts (human, drugs, weapons, and goods), political and sociopolitical fragmentation, and the absence of a strong government.

The dire situation in Libya is defined by another serious reality: the rule of militias. In the field of security, paramilitary actors are the backbone of the country; but because they are not organized as a part of a regular army, they have become one of the main sources of disorder and insecurity in Libya. With recent events, militias from the west did indeed gather under one umbrella with the aim of protecting Tripoli; however, this move does not aim to safeguard governmental institutions and the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA). In reality, militias are acting first and foremost in their own interests.

Is there an efficient way to compel militias to disarm and/or put themselves under the rule of an official governmental army? In reality, no. Strategies and efforts to disarm militias or circumscribe their role have all failed up to now. Militias and their leaders are fully aware that the political vacuum and prevailing uncertainties in Libya give them further power and influence; consequently, the end of their rule is not yet foreseeable.

This does not mean that the way forward to achieving stabilization – including through the disarmament of militias – would be out of reach; there is no doubt that stabilization will be achieved one day, and militias disarmed by then. Yet to achieve that, Libya's regional, national and local specificities must be well-understood, and the way forward to solving the country's core problems must be defined accurately.

This article will look at the strategies required to address Libya's most pressing issues and challenges. After placing Libya in its regional context, it will discuss the main dynamics prevailing from a security point of view. The last part will be dedicated to the points that need to be quickly and seriously addressed if Libya is to move forward.

The post-2011 conflictual scene: An overview

The fall of former Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011 was the obvious starting point of the Arab uprisings. In many cases, Arab states witnessed popular demonstrations based mainly on the people's demands for better living conditions. In countries where these popular movements did not occur (Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories…) the reason for their absence was more attributable to intertwining historical and sociological causes rather than a lack of the same grievances driving popular movements in other countries.

Historians do not agree on whether the popular regional wave that followed the Tunisian "Jasmine Revolution" was internally-induced or orchestrated by foreign actors.[1] Regardless, there is little doubt that, at the time, most people in the region were disillusioned by the prevalence of corruption, clientelism, authoritarianism, the lack of respect for their basic rights, and poor socioeconomic conditions; which certainly fueled and intensified the anger and frustration behind the uprisings.

The fact that some Libyans engaged in a revolution of their own, starting from February 2011, is anything but surprising. Any visitor to Libya before February 2011[2] could feel the climate of fear and oppression prevailing at that time. Most citizens were frustrated by the limits placed by the ruling regime on society, such as restrictions on social mobility and freedom of expression.[3] Yet few of them dared to speak out against these restrictions due to fear of reprisals. Rumors about how critics and dissidents were jailed and/or tortured were widespread in Libya. The most well-known example of these abuses was the notorious 1996 massacre at the Abu Salim prison;[4] another horrific case adding to the thousands of killings, disappearances, and torture cases characteristic of Muammar Gaddafi's long rule.

Gaddafi's 42 year-rule (1969-2011), combined with the particularities of Libya's recent history (colonialism, wars, a monarchy prevailing over geographical divisions…), rendered the emergence of a robust and effective Libyan civil society difficult. This may be a primary cause of Libya's shift- with the Arab uprisings – from an authoritarian rule to a fragmented political and societal scene.

Under Muammar Gaddafi, unity did not prevail in Libya; the Libyan leader had inherited a divisive national landscape from his predecessor. One of these divisions was regional, with the

three main provinces (Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Fezzan) forming Libya while maintaining some local specificities. Besides, the feeling of national belonging within the state was often challenged by tribal allegiances characterizing a large segment of Libyan society. Gaddafi, as well as King Idriss of Libya (1951-1969) before him, had to take tribal loyalties into consideration when exerting their rule.[5] Gaddafi took care of tribes loyal to him, fulfilling their needs; while at the same time excluding and/or harshly treating tribes failing to demonstrate a strong allegiance to him.[6]

Gaddafi was able to manipulate tribal allegiances and channel them in way that prevented tribes from forming a unified block that could threaten his rule one day. This is undoubtedly a significant reason behind the chaos and disorder in Libya starting from February 2011. Anti-Gaddafi protests had no overall coordination, consisting of a variety of actors - united primarily by their opposition to Gaddafi - going out into the streets and confronting actors loyal to Gaddafi.[7]

That said, the defections on Gaddafi's side were represented by several individuals and movements lacking the potential for unity[8] and working hand in hand against the regime.[9] This confusion most likely allowed Gaddafi to stay in power for several months, as he wasn't challenged by any strong and/or coordinated rivals. The fragmentation of Libya's political scene was already apparent back then.

At the same time, Libya shares many characteristics with its neighbors. While being a wealthy country, Libya has failed to satisfy the needs of its population.[10] Undoubtedly, the population's basic needs were met under Gaddafi. Yet people felt that while their leader and his elite were sitting comfortably atop oil revenues, they were unjustly facing political and societal repression.[11] Similar to the dominant trends in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in 2011, many Libyans felt it was urgent to take advantage of the winds of change blowing throughout the region. It may be true that media coverage of Libya's initial demonstrations was exaggerated, especially by those channels belonging to governments that had an interest in seeing Libya's leader overthrown.[12] However, this does not diminish the fact that there was a general feeling of rejection toward Gaddafi's rule, at least in the country's most important towns (Benghazi, Misrata, Tripoli[13]…) and among its most important groups.

The long, four-decade rule of Muammar Gaddafi enflamed the general frustration felt by Libyans. The country's youth were born under the rule of a leader who seemed irremovable, which limited their hopes of witnessing social evolution and positive political change. Gaddafi had a very particular –and restrictive– model of Jamahiriya, his claim that power was exerted by sovereign people. He feigned that he had no influence over the trajectory of executive power in Libya, while it was apparent to the population that he was paving the way for the rule of his son Saif al-Islam. This served to nurture popular resentment towards his rule and intensified the conviction that something had to change one day. In spite of this, Gaddafi was able to prevent the emergence of any meaningful political opposition, while playing to the illusion that the only people fighting against his rule were extremists connected to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.[14] Obviously, this would benefit him after 09/11.[15]

While Libya shared many characteristics with its neighbors, there was still something missing crucial for the country's fate: the existence of a strong army.[16] While the army significantly shaped transitions in some countries in the region, such as Tunisia and Egypt, the absence of an efficient army in Libya, characterized by strong and powerful elements, resulted in a power vacuum. In Syria, president Bashar Assad may well owe a part of his political survival to the fact that the army did not turn its back on him. In Libya, military commanders could neither rely on a strong institution nor on the population's allegiance.

With Gaddafi, all institutions were assimilated under the leader, and this contributed to a popular rejection of all the state's institutions, army included. Obviously, had there been a strong army, this could have also meant that Gaddafi would have been defended and protected from overthrow as the population was repressed. Yet even in this scenario, avoiding the creation of a political vacuum could have altered, in part at least, the country's destiny.

Despite the destruction and damage in a country such as Syria, it is also true that because institutions were kept intact, the country may avoid further destruction and/or partition as it moves towards a possible end of the war. In Libya, events did not unfold in the same way. The absence of clearly identified institutions emanating from a strong government is causing the country's state of fragility and constant uncertainty.[17] The NATO intervention in 2011 had already highlighted the inexistence of a strong army in Libya; since then, many leaders and organizations managed to create militias in an attempt to gain power and influence.

The aftermath of the Libyan National Army[18]'s attempt to take over Tripoli in early April 2019 gives a good indication of the nature of the problems that are - and that may – continue to face Libya. The Tripoli-based "internationally recognized government" benefitted from a move by Western-based militias to unify and commit to pushing back the LNA, and/or destroying it. Yet this unity is a military move only, and it does not imply any commitment by these militias to form part of a regular army. Ironically, the LNA has the advantage of responding to a central command, under the orders of Khalifa Haftar; it is different in western Libya, where military perspectives are not deferential to centralization.

The Libyan security context: State of play and main dynamics

If it weren't for its volatile security situation, Libya would most likely generate less media attention. Indeed, problems at the security level explain observers' concern about developments in Libya. Rivalries and polarization reflect on the international community's failure to turn Muammar Gaddafi's fall into a success story, and this is, in itself, a matter of frustration.

That said, it is obvious that Libya's political vacuum caused and continues to cause instability in the sub-region, fueling migration from Libya, often to Europe. Immigration is an issue that remains high on European states' agendas. Unfortunately, European fears of large numbers of people seeking better lives and opportunities on their soil does not often correlate to an interest in addressing the root causes of this mass migration in the first place.

The security context and what is at stake

Libya is at the crossroads of many intertwined dynamics. While other countries in the region may be experiencing, to some extent, security-related problems, Libya faces a deluge of virtually every conceivable security issue. The political vacuum in the aftermath of the Gaddafi regime's fall opened the door to various types of rivalries, starting with the struggle over power.[19] Hence, actors wanting to increase their influence and capabilities were fast – and often successful – in finding support from regional and international actors.[20] These, combined with the natural volatility of the sub-region, generated an explosive context.

The four main security issues marking Libya's developments are as follows: arms circulation, smuggling, militias, and migration.[21] Libya's instability and insecurity is obviously caused by a convergence of more than simply these four issues; nevertheless, addressing these issues is vital to attaining the level of security necessary to benefit the population and provide it access to basic needs and services.

Libya needs a coordinated and efficient strategy to move towards effective state-building. Furthermore, all the above-mentioned security challenges also need powerful and determined actors able to impose a strategy based on a clear vision and a realistic plan. This objective is difficult to reach. Quickly reaching stability in Libya under the prevailing political and institutional divisions is an illusionary aim.

Reality and role of institutional representatives

Since 2011, Libya has not benefited from a strong central government. All the official governments that succeeded each other ended up being inefficient. Rivalries, both political and ideological, and the absence of a strong actor capable of facilitating an efficient transition plan, are significant causes of the failure of these successful governments.

With the launch of the so-called "Operation Dignity" in 2014,[22] the Libyan landscape evolved towards more clarity: Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, presiding over a Libyan military (the Libyan National Army) that had been absent from Libya for over two decades, officially launched a war[23] on what he called "radicals" (i.e. Islamists) in western Libya. By doing so, he intended to take a share of power.

The end of "Operation Dignity," combined with the constitution of the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in December 2015,[24] would become the official starting point for an institutional division of Libya. The Tripoli-based GNA rules from the west, within what corresponds –roughly speaking– to the boundaries of the region of Tripolitania. The eastern-based government headed by prime minister Abdullah al-Thinni, the House of Representatives, and the Libyan National Army (LNA) have sovereignty in the region of Cyrenaica.

Libya's third historical region, the Fezzan, became a significant point of contention between these two symbolic sets of institutions, with the LNA gaining the upper hand in large parts of this province as it launched a new military offensive in early 2019.[25] Khalifa Haftar's instigation of the battle for Tripoli in early April 2019 would incite the Tripoli-based Sarraj government to

launch the "Operation Volcano of Rage" in return, causing the LNA to lose the geographical and strategic advantage it had on the ground.

The Fezzan region is characterized by tribal and ethnic identities, allowing local leaders to rule in their traditional, historical territories while deciding with whom they want to engage. The LNA's offensive on southern Libya in early 2019 proved that agreements negotiated informally would benefit Khalifa Haftar. Tribal stances may be volatile, but the facility with which Haftar was able to combine military strength with negotiated pacts with tribes, and the importance of these pacts to his successes, is worth mentioning. For example, without securing an agreement with the Magareha and the Hasawena,[26] Haftar wouldn't have been able to touch southwestern Libya.

The reality and role of militias and military leaders
Neither the LNA nor the western-based "army" is comparable to a standard army: both are largely based on the action of militias. Yet despite this similarity, the LNA of the east and the army of the west are fundamentally different. In the west, the GNA's security and "stability" is entirely dependent on powerful militias. Each of these militias have an agenda of their own,[27] despite appearances of unity when it comes to fighting a common enemy vying for control over Tripoli or western Libya. By contrast; in the east the LNA is largely based on militias that seem less inclined toward relative autonomy or defection. Indeed, leaders of the militias forming the core of the LNA are Haftar's own sons, and commanders that have proved their loyalty.

This distinction between the two militaries is crucial. Indeed, internationally-recognized Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj of the GNA depends on the support of the international community, rather than on the military or militia allegiance; this makes him vulnerable losing his position. While in the east, Haftar's foundations are significantly more solid. The eastern-based Field Marshal was able to prevail as one of the country's truly strong leaders, though he did so at the price of authoritarian decisions and human rights abuses.[28]

This also explains why Haftar's insistence on maintaining a strong military role hardly provokes strong international criticism in response. Libya may be suffering institutional fragmentation, but it needs to keep prospects open for including everyone in a political solution; several countries act therefore as if countering Libya's only real strongman would definitely jeopardize the prospects for an inclusive – though imperfect – solution.[29]

The role of regional and international actors
Libya can't be understood independently from the meddling of foreign actors; some of which attempt to have a constructive role, while others are spoilers.

In 2011, Qatar was a very influential actor that favored some players at the expense of others; its agenda was very keen on supporting people close to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Abdelhakim Belhaj, Ali Salabi or Sadeq Ghariani.[30]

This bias toward the Muslim Brotherhood prevailed as Libya's political landscape progressively fragmented. This fragmentation allowed other actors to invest in Libya's political

scene. The UAE and Egypt[31] are currently Khalifa Haftar's main and most important backers, providing him with access to considerable funds and ammunition.[32]

Saudi Arabia also has an important role in Libya's political landscape as a backer of the Madkhaliya, a Salafi ideology.[33]Madkhalis are now known for influencing many militias under the authority of the LNA. Their influence also extends to the west, as exemplified by the Radaa force led by Abderraouf Kara.[34]

Several western or European states are important to the developments in Libya as well. France and Italy are very active, their desire to further their self-interests is evident in their rivalries and tensions. But while Italy is clearly keen on dealing with politicians, military officers, and businessmen in the west of Libya under the GNA, France's alleged strong support of Haftar is concurrent with its backing of the GNA. In addition, states such as Finland, Germany, Norway, and Sweden also have roles worth mentioning. However, these roles are focused on diplomacy, technical projects, and/or development rather than on military prospects.

Russia is also a significant actor in Libya, despite notable ambiguity surrounding its real role and inclinations; officially, Moscow tries to stand equidistant from the GNA and the eastern-based institutions. Much is being said about the activities of some private military contractors (PMCs) in the east,[35] but the only certainty is Russia's desire of an active role, including at the diplomatic level. It is still difficult to classify Russia as either a spoiler or a positive broker; beyond its official statements, its orientations are unclear, with diplomatic channels open on both Tripoli and Rajma. At the same time, Russia's opposition in April 2019 to a UN resolution critical of Khalifa Haftar is a clear indication of how keen it is on allowing the LNA to gain strength and legitimacy.

The US has not always been clear either in regards to revealing its intentions towards Libya. Its interest in "anti-terrorism" is evident, and it is characterized by the actions of AFRICOM.[36] From a diplomatic point of view, the intense activity of Stephanie Williams, the assistant of the UN's special envoy to Libya, is perhaps indicative that her moves are reflective of Washington's point of view.

American intentions in regards to Libya's political future still lack facts and clarity.[37] In 2012, following the assassination in Benghazi of US ambassador Chris Stevens, the US had shown more interest in Libya and its security issues; since then, Washington has given the impression that it is taking a distance from events in Libya, dedicating most of its attention to security and ISIS-related issues.

With Donald Trump's presidency, the focus on terrorism-related issues has been intensified. Stephanie Williams' nomination to UNSMIL is also an indication that the US wants to have its say on political and institutional developments. It took some time before Washington condemned Khalifa Haftar's attempted military takeover of Tripoli in April 2019. While the eventual condemnation was a clear indication that the US would be backing the GNA in Tripoli, the time it took for the US to condemn Haftar and the LNA also suggests that the US is not ruling out the possibility of Haftar playing a political role in the future.

The UN ends up being the actor that could, potentially, genuinely make the difference in Libya. Despite many difficulties linked to the complexity of the country, the UN is still trying to push for

an inclusive[38] solution that would take into consideration a wide spectrum of the Libyan sociopolitical scene and could include even Islamists and persons keen on the "former regime."[39] That said, UN envoy Ghassan Salame's moves have so far failed to bring the conditions required for a positive development. A "national conference" expected to be organized by him in mid-April 2019 had to be cautiously postponed due to battles on the ground.

Yet these developments do not change anything in regards to the nature of the problems in the country. For the time being, Libya's prospects depend on several issues: the organization of a constitutional referendum; municipal, legislative and presidential elections; and the agreement of the country's main players on a solution for the future, something that implies indeed the organization of an "inclusive conference." On all these points, the UN is meant to have a crucial contribution.

On the other hand, in the short run, it may be nothing short of miracle that everybody expects the UN to perform in Libya. While Libya's players hardly agree on power-sharing and institutional building, interference of foreign countries (UAE, Egypt, Russia, France, Italy…) and their political and/or military backing of some actors at the expense of others fuel problems rather than solve them. Putting an end to foreign interference would definitely help to move forward positively and confidently in Libya.

The Way Forward

The current situation, with Libya's main actors fighting each other, proves further that there is no easy way to move forward in Libya. Events since 2011 have caused the country to evolve amidst instability and uncertainties. Institutional divisions, power rivalries, deficits at the socioeconomic level, and virtual fragmentation are some of Libya's ongoing characteristics.

As of early 2019, current developments in Libya lacked clarity. Khalifa Haftar and the LNA's offensive in early 2019 in the south had garnered them considerable territorial advances as well as control of some of the region's most important oil fields.[40] The LNA had even been able to benefit from the acquiescence of some local communities to put their hands on symbolic and/or important southern towns, such as Sebha. Haftar's attempt to take over Tripoli in April 2019 brought important changes: militias in western Libya rejected his coup de force, while the LNA faced losses of territory and influence. Furthermore, the potential for reconciliation, in the form of the UN-backed national conference between Libya's protagonists, was postponed to an unknown date.

In Tripoli, up until March 2019, the GNA had made several military appointments in southern Libya,[41] in an attempt to counteract the impression that Khalifa Haftar was the dominant influence there. But Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj failed to prove that he was any kind of strong man. The limits of his "army's" advances, the uncertainty surrounding his capacity to rely on strong and efficient military forces such as those based in Misrata, as well his full reliance upon autonomous militias to secure the capital, rendered only one certainty: the foundations of the Libyan Prime Minister's rule were very fragile.

Fayez Sarraj may give the impression that he is strong, especially since Khalifa Haftar's April 2019 coup de force compelled the international community to back the GNA rather than the LNA. But this impression is false, Sarraj could disappear as quickly as he came to power, especially since he owes his position to an external appointment. Additionally, he is the official face of a government that is barely held together, as indicated by the alleged tensions and disagreements that he has with one of western Libya's strongmen, the minister of interior from Misrata, Fathi Bashagha.

Those elements of context, added to the crucial developments that take place regularly at Libya's southern borders, make it illusionary to believe that any "solution" to Libya's challenges is forthcoming in the near future. The country's main centers of power continue to be extremely divided, not even in agreement on the minimum bases for a common agenda. Institutional divisions and the encouragement of further military rivalries seem to be Libya's only certainties for the time being.

Therefore, few pragmatic or realistic scenarios are plausible at the moment to address Libya's most pressing challenges. At the same time, this does not mean that there is no potential solution for Libya. The many risks and threats generated by this oil-rich country explain why Libya remains very high on the international agenda. The fact that some of the world's most influential countries –US, Russia, China, France, UK, Italy- are so deeply involved in Libya is a serious indication that Libyans won't be left alone before a solution is formulated. This is in spite of the fact that the action of spoilers will most likely continue to complicate prospects.

While there is no easy or fast solution for Libya, moving step by step and focusing first on the country's most pressing challenges can help set the foundation for a more positive long-term plan. Such a plan can only have the support of the UN to be guaranteed, with the contribution of specific national actors that can place pressure on the main Libyan players.

The top priority steps requiring action are as follows:

Find an agreement with western-based militias

Armed militias are both part of the problem and part of the solution in Libya. Any idea of dissolving the militias or integrating them within a "Libyan army" is illusionary, at least for the west, where no such army exists in any case. Fully incorporating militia leaders into the transitional process is perhaps the best way to induce a feeling of national duty or belonging among them. Talking to militia leaders, giving them guarantees on their future and on the military positions they would have within a "national army," are all ways to incorporate them into the transitional process. The fact that militias were able to unite when Haftar wanted to take over Tripoli is a sign that they can agree on common objectives. The challenge for the UN will be to take them one step further and get them to agree on being part of an army under the government's authority.

Favour transitional justice

This point is crucial, and it is linked to the former. Some militia leaders and their members use violence in a way that makes them stand on the illegal side of things; the same goes for many other

Libyan paramilitary actors. The frequent intermingling of military actions and criminal activities adds complexity to the matter. By helping to define the terms of transitional justice, the UN would get Libyans to see that perpetrators of crimes would be held accountable for their actions. This does not contradict formulating an amnesty law that could play a role in the future, on a case-by-case basis. However, this can only play a role in the long run, when the Libyan conflicts are genuinely in the past.

Find a common ground with Khalifa Haftar

Despite the fact that he provoked criticism and anger since his attempted military takeover of Tripoli in April 2019, there is no question that Khalifa Haftar is one of Libya's strongmen. The LNA that he commands is also a very powerful institution that must be taken into account. All of this makes it very important for the UN to get Libyans to agree on the terms of a formula that will guarantee Haftar a military position in Libya's future, but without enabling him to interfere at the political level. To be achieved, pressure needs to be exerted on Haftar by both influential powers and his backers. This is where the contribution and capacity of the following states - the USA, the UAE, Egypt, France, and even Russia- to influence Khalifa Haftar is central.

Give more resources to humanitarian NGOs

Libya's problems are not only about military prospects; they are also related to socioeconomic issues and humanitarian concerns. Libyans need safe access to their basic needs –starting with food and potable water- and this makes it important for humanitarian NGOs to receive additional resources, and to be able to access Libyan citizens, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

Prioritize organizing municipal elections

At the institutional level, Libya's most pressing concerns are known: organizing a referendum on a new constitution, and holding presidential, legislative and municipal elections. However, UN envoy Ghassan Salame's difficulties in organizing a National Conference to officially overcome divisions led to regular postponement of elections, as witnessed by the spring 2019 municipal elections, which had to be postponed because of events.

That said, Libyans in general seem disposed to designate their local representatives. This makes it important to prioritize organizing municipal elections; with some exceptions, most municipal elections will manage to find a way to compensate for the deficit of action of "governmental structures," therefore guaranteeing better prospects for citizens while allowing a certain form of management to concretely prevail.

Those steps must also be encouraged by applying Law 59/2012[42] on the Local Administration System,[43] with influential local military leaders not interfering in local affairs. Obviously, having an official constitution adopted by referendum, in the long run, would be considerably beneficial here. Yet in the meantime, municipal elections can run efficiently as long as they are allowed to function without interference.

Reinforce control at borders

Borders are not only about refugees. While refugee-related issues need serious and efficient action, the solution for this matter extends beyond Libya. At the same time, more control at Libya's borders is a requirement needing Libyan institutional actors - and their regional and international counterparts, and ad hoc bodies and institutions - to deal efficiently with the matter.

Monitoring borders more efficiently is far from easy, and it cannot happen overnight. Nevertheless, seriously considering the required financial and human needs is the only way to better control migration; arms, drugs and human trafficking; cross-border movements of armed fighters (especially those coming from Chad and Sudan), among other important issues.

Regulating oil-related prospects by more UN-led control on production and exportation

Oil is at the center of Libya's problems and requires serious action. The National Oil Company (NOC) is meant to take decisions on this matter, but it is limited in its actions, as underscored recently by the developments in the Sharara oilfield. Oil is clearly crucial for the country's present and future, as demonstrated by the action of some armed militias, oil smuggling, ambiguity surrounding Libya's oil exports, and the full dependence of Libya's income on oil revenues. Oil-related prospects must therefore be set and defined accordingly by a UN 'roadmap' giving concrete recommendations on how this sector must be (re)organized.

This would also require actors involved in Libya to adhere to the UN's demands and recommendations, and to stop putting their self-interests over Libya's interests and most pressing needs.

Conclusion

Libya has many advantages that can help it achieve peace. As a large country with a small population, Libya benefits from vast oil and gas reserves that guarantee its financial future and prospects for socioeconomic development. But Libya also has significant difficulties that jeopardize its security and stability. Among these, underdevelopment, the lack of liquidities, human trafficking, and arms smuggling; and their impact on both the country and its population. Furthermore, Libya must find a way to rise above the following difficulties: political and ideological divisions, the absence of state sovereignty, the struggle for power, the absence of a regular army, migration, foreign interference, and the strong role of militias.

Disarming militias would considerably help in solving some of Libya's most pressing problems. Yet this can hardly be achieved for the time being: the absence of both an army and a strong and sovereign government empowers militias. Events such as that which unfolded in spring 2019, when the LNA tried to take control of the capital Tripoli, further underscore how the political void fuels and strengthens militias. This makes it all the more difficult to reverse a process based on the rule of militias – but not impossible.

The way forward to building positive prospects for Libya's future can only come step by step, in the long run, with the help of a neutral body – the UN – and by favoring decisions that pertain

to specific fields, not necessarily only to the military. Putting the main emphasis on military questions will always bring serious obstacles, while favoring decisions related to socioeconomic development will tackle what can really be improved quickly. And acting in this way will potentially even encourage motivated Libyans to give back the monopoly of legitimate violence to the state structure, instead of having to endure a militia rule that cannot favor peace, by definition. But this must be preceded by the path to reconciliation -and this path can be long.

About the Author

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[1] For an overview of this point, read for example Reza Akhlaghi, "The Arab Spring: Conspiracy Theory or National Will", Foreign Policy Association, May 2013, https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2013/05/11/the-arab-spring-conspiracy-theory-or-national-will/

[2] For an overview of the situation that prevailed in Libya up to the end of 2010, see Amnesty International, "Libyan Arab Jamahiriya: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review", November-December 2010, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/40000/mde190052010en.pdf

[3] These restrictions had prevailed shortly after Moammar Gaddafi came to power; Law 75 adopted in 1973 carried already a set of restrictions that would keep prevailing during Gaddafi's long rule.

[4] Human Rights Watch, "Libya: June 1996 Killings at Abu Salim Prison", 27th of June 2006, https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/06/27/libya-june-1996-killings-abu-salim-prison

[5] As Amal Obeidi puts it, "*in the 1990s the regime has realised the importance of the role of tribes within Libyan society. This realisation has led the regime to seek tribal support, and hence legitimacy, through conceding influence at the social level (…). By the early 1990s, was clear that tribes has become one of the main sources of political legitimacy of the regime and one of the key factors in stabilising the internal situation*"; Amal Obeidi, *Political Culture in Libya*, Rootledge, 2001, p.120.

[6] Mansouria Mokhefi, "Gaddafi's Regime in Relation to the Libyan Tribes", Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 2011, http://www.aljazeera.net/mritems/streams/2011/3/20/1_1049205_1_51.pdf

[7] Elvin Aghayev, "Analysis and Background of the Arab Spring in Libya", European Researcher, 2013, Vol. 39, No. 1-2, available at:
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[8] "Libyan Rebel Efforts Frustrated by Internal Disputes over Leadership", The Guardian, 3rd of April 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/03/libya-rebel-leadership-split

[9] "Over 100 Libyan army members defect from Gaddafi", *Reuters*, 30th of May 2011, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-officers/over-100-libyan-army-members-defect-from-gaddafi-idUSTRE74T41820110530

[10] "Libya: Country Economic Report", *World Bank*, 2006,
http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/918691468053103808/Libya-Country-economic-report

[11] On the socioeconomic situation and the population's resentment that prevailed in Libya under Gaddafi's rule, see Alison Pargeter, "Libya: Reforming the Impossible?", Review of African political Economy, No. 108, 2006, pp. 219-235.

[12] Sumaya Al Nahed, "Covering Libya: A Framing Analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC Coverage of the 2011 Libyan Uprising and NATO Intervention", *Middle East Critique*, 24-3, August 2015, pp. 1-17.

[13] "Map of the rebellion in Libya, Day by Day",

http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/25/world/middleeast/map-of-how-the-protests-unfolded-in-libya.html?hp

[14] The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) is an Islamist Libyan group founded in 1995 that had the objective of toppling the rule of Moammar Gaddafi. It is not clear whether it is still active in Libya, but its ideology has survived. Abdelhakim Belhadj, one of Libya's best known islamists, ruled the LIFG before he created his own party, al-Watan.

[15] Officially, it is only starting from 2003 that many countries that were at odds with Libya, will change and open up to having better relations withMoammar Gaddafi. On the evolution of the American perception of Libya, and how it got conditioned first and foremost by interests, read Kristin Kushlan, "Constructing Muammar al-Gaddafi" (2007), Honors Theses. 1036. https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/1036/?utm_source=scholarship.richmond.edu%2Fhonors-theses%2F1036&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

[16] Florence Gaub (2013): The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression, Journal of Strategic Studies, DOI:10.1080/01402390.2012.742010, available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Florence_Gaub/publication/263313001_The_Libyan_Armed_Forces_between_Coup-proofing_and_Repression/links/592e891245851553b6592fc4/The-Libyan-Armed-Forces-between-Coup-proofing-and-Repression.pdf?origin=publication_detail

[17] On political and institutional fragmentation in Libya, read Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux, "The Failure to End Libya's Fragmentation and Future Prospects", Middle East Brief No. 110, Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 2017, https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB110.pdf

[18] A strong outnumbered militia rather tan an army, the Libyan Nationale Army (LNA) is led by Khalifa Haftar, one of Libya's strongmen that is based in the town of Marj, in the eastern part of Libya.

[19] Mohamed Al-Jarh, "Beyond Islamists and Autocrats: Struggling to Advance in Post-Spring Libya", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2017, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/BeyondIslamists-Eljarh.pdf

[20] https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/without-international-support-libya-spoilers-will-sabotage-political-process-disrupt

[21] Djallil Lounnas, "The Libyan Security Continuum: The Impact of the Libyan Crisis on the North African/Sahelian Regional System", MENARA Working Papers, No. 15, October 2018, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_15.pdf

[22] For an overview of this conflict, read Sari Arraf, "Libya: A Short Guide on the Conflict", The War Report 2017, Geneva Academy, 2017, http://tiny.cc/it8p5y

[23] https://jamestown.org/program/operation-dignity-general-haftars-latest-battle-may-decide-libyas-future/

[24] https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Libyan%20Political%20Agreement%20-%20ENG%20.pdf

[25] https://www.albayan.ae/one-world/arabs/2019-03-02-1.3501558

[26] http://tiny.cc/5v8p5y

[27] The situation evolves quickly, but an interesting and very accurate overview of the situation as it stood in Tripoli in Spring 2018 can be found in this report: Wolfram Lacher, Alaa al-Idrissi, "Capital of Militias: Tripoli's Armed Groups Capture the Libyan State", Small Arms Surveys. Briefing Paper, June 2018. http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Tripoli-armed-groups.pdf

[28] See, among many other examples, what occurred apparently in Benghazi (https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/22/libya-war-crimes-benghazi-residents-flee) in March 2017, or in Derna all through the last year (https://www.libyanexpress.com/human-rights-watch-demands-haftars-forces-to-end-siege-of-civilians-in-libyas-derna/).

[29] Beyond the case of countries that are known for backing Haftar directly (Egypt, United Arab emirates, France, Russia…), countries that have a preference for the GNA nevertheless also deal with Haftar directly, as this is the case with the US, Italy, Germany…

[30] Andrew McGregor, "Qatar's Role in the Libyan Conflict: Who's on the Lists of Terrorists and Why", Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 15 Issue 14, The Jamestown Foundation, 2017, https://jamestown.org/program/qatars-role-libyan-conflict-whos-lists-terrorists/

[31] Jalel Harchaoui, "Haftar's Ailing Narrative", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76372

[32] Thomas Howes-Ward, "Libya's Foreign Militias", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/76034

[33] Frederic Wehrey, "Quiet No More?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2016, https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/64846

[34] Jules Crétois, "Libye : qui sont les forces spéciales Radaa, ces puissants salafistes de Tripoli qui ont capturé le frère du kamikaze de Manchester ?", Jeune Afrique, 26th of May 2017,
https://www.jeuneafrique.com/442626/politique/libye-forces-speciales-rada-puissants-salafistes-de-tripoli-ont-capture-frere-kamikaze-de-manchester/

[35] See for example Alec Luhn and Dominic Nicholls, "Russian Mercenaries Back Libyan Rebel Leader as Moscow Seeks Influence in Africa", The Telegraph, 3rd of March 2019,
https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/03/03/russian-mercenaries-back-libyan-rebel-leader-moscow-seeks-influence/

[36] Carla Babb, "US Conducts Precision Airstrike in Libya", VOA News, 30th of November 2018,
https://www.voanews.com/a/us-conducts-precision-airstrike-in-libya/4681542.html

[37] https://ly.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-and-libya-sign-several-civilian-security-agreements/

[38] UNSMIL, "The Libyan National Conference Process: Final Report", November 2018,
https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/ncp_report_jan_2019_en.pdf

[39] Though not publicized, the fact is that many of the gatherings that prevailed ahead of the organization of a UN conference in Spring 2019 were meant to help favoring an "inclusive solution" where almost all representatives of the Libyan political spectrum, including Islamists and partisans of the "old regime", would have sited down together and discussed.

[40] Chris Stephen, "Eastern Forces Expand Libyan Energy Sector Grip", Petroleum Economist, 5th of March 2019,
https://www.petroleum-economist.com/articles/politics-economics/middle-east/2019/eastern-forces-expand-libyan-energy-sector-grip

[41] Like for example the nomination, in February 2019, of Ali Kana, a key military figure, as Commander of Sebha's Military Region: https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1580306/libya-sarraj-appoints-new-military-commander-sabha

[42] Law 59/2012 does not recognize at all full power to municipalities in Libya; as imperfect as it is, it still gives municipal councils the possibility of providing services together with the central authorities. This point is crucial today, considering the many difficulties that "the state" has in providing citizens their basic needs.

[43] This taking into consideration the difficulties that prevail there since decentralization is often perceived by Libyans as the way forward to fragmentation. On the advantages of favoring decentralization in Libya, read this policy brief from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Empowered Decentralization: A City-based Strategy for Rebuilding Libya", February 2019,
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/FP_20190228_libya.pdf