



Libya's Turbulent Transition The Pressing Need for Security Sector Reform

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SUMMARY

- The fall of the Gaddafi regime left a security vacuum in Libya that was filled by dozens of militias loosely classified into two opposing camps: the revolutionaries and the “establishment.”
- The current government has been unable to implement a clear plan for security sector reform, as militias in both camps have resisted government-led integration initiatives.
- Libya's insecurity has affected the country's progress on other fronts, particularly on issues of democracy and governance as well as economic growth.
- Though the international community has marshalled considerable resources in support of Libya's security sector, the U.S. should encourage greater coordination between donors and follow-up on pledges.

The militia-led abduction of Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in October 2013 was a stark reminder of the urgent need to address the deteriorating security situation in the country. More than two years after the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, the central government has not been able to extend complete control over Libya's vast territory or reign in the various armed groups that emerged during the revolution. The lack of security has stalled progress: rampant insecurity has hampered economic progress and undermined the credibility of the central government, threatening the fragile democratic transition. As such, security sector reform (SSR) must be a top priority in any plan for rebuilding Libya's future. Although these efforts require trust-building measures to build domestic consensus, the United States can take constructive steps to assist the Libyan government in addressing this challenge.

THE POST-GADDAFI SECURITY LANDSCAPE

The fall of the Gaddafi regime left a security vacuum in Libya that was quickly filled by dozens of locally affiliated militias. These groups frequently engage in criminal activities for financial, ideological, or politically motivated ends. The Libyan government has been unable to crack down on these activities, due in part to the absence of authoritative means to enforce its power, exacerbated by corruption amongst high-ranking officials.

The unstable security environment has led to an increase in violent crime, including the destruction of Sufi shrines, the siege of government ministries, and attacks on Western embassies. The most well known of these assaults was the September 2012 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi that led to the death of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. Additionally, the

security crisis is frequently underscored by the assassination of military officers, which has been occurring roughly once every two weeks.

Although violence often seems indiscriminate and incoherent, local skirmishes fit loosely into a broader power struggle between two opposing camps: the revolutionaries and the establishment. The revolutionary camp seeks to purge the political, economic, and social institutions of individuals associated with the former regime. The establishment, on the other hand, consists of fragments of the old military and security apparatus that continue to play a role in the country. This struggle was aptly demonstrated in the May 2013 siege of government ministries by various elements of the revolutionary camp demanding the passage of the Political Isolation Law, which would effectively ban any individual connected to Gaddafi's regime from holding government office. Though much of the violence is delineated along this division, there is substantial intra-group fighting as well, further complicating the security landscape.

The militias currently operating in Libya vary in size, motivation, affiliation, degree of discipline, and sources of funding. There are no reliable records tracking the militias that have proliferated during and after the civil war, as their sheer number and often informal or ad hoc nature make them difficult to identify and classify. Armed groups that could be classified in the revolutionary camp include Islamists, federalists, and some tribal groups using the language of the revolution to justify their actions. Similarly, the establishment is a diverse collection of counter-revolutionaries, ex-military members, former officials from Gaddafi's government, and conservatives.

Both camps have strongly resisted the central government's integration campaign. The revolutionaries accuse the government of being illegitimate. The establishment views many of the revolutionaries as undisciplined and chaotic, and it strives to maintain the influence it wields within the government's formal security institutions. It has therefore been resistant to efforts to allow some of these new forces to integrate into its existing structures and chains of command.

Though a national army exists and could conceivably act as a counter to the militias, it is weak and lacks leadership, morale, and cohesion. Under Gaddafi, troops were organized to prevent a coup. To that end, officers were frequently rotated and positions were allocated based on tribal affiliation rather than merit; loyalty was rewarded with a leadership position in the military. A brigade commander noted that the new Libyan state inherited "an army of all chiefs but no Indians," referring to the outsized number of high-ranking military officials compared to the number of junior and midlevel officers.¹

GOVERNMENT-LED REFORM INITIATIVES

Though Prime Minister Ali Zeidan has pushed a number of ad hoc security sector reforms, political infighting and waning political clout have obstructed progress. As a result, the current government has been unable to implement a clear plan for security sector reform and remains reliant on two semi-official security bodies set up by the National Transitional Council: the Libya Shield Forces (LSF) and Supreme Security Committee (SSC). These bodies were authorized as auxiliary forces that operated parallel to the military and police under the authority of the army Chief of Staff and Interior Minister, respectively. The LSF and SSC were intended to be the first step toward giving the government a degree of control over the various militias. The government hoped that by identifying these groups and placing them under the authority of ministers that it could gradually facilitate their integration into the formal security apparatus.

The SSC was set up to be a temporary body to absorb revolutionary brigades under the command of the Interior Ministry. However, the militias were integrated wholesale into the SSC, retaining their existing structures of command and autonomy. Because the militias were more loyal to their unit commanders than the Interior Minister, the SSC as a whole lacked a coherent agenda and was only nominally under the control of the government. These weaknesses prompted several attempts to dissolve the SSC.

At the end of 2011, Interim Prime Minister Abdel Rahim al-Keib set up the Warrior Affairs

Commission that sought to gauge the aspirations of SSC and brigade fighters. This information was used either to provide incentives for the fighters to join the state's armed forces and police, or to find them alternative employment. However, because of the commission's limited resources and a lack of political cooperation, its impact was minimal. The armed forces were reluctant to absorb too many militiamen, and the militias rejected integration with remnants of the former regime.

In December 2012, the government again attempted to dissolve the SSC by discontinuing pay for non-integrated forces. However, Zeidan later reversed this decision, declaring that the security situation still required the SSC, and that such dissolution would require agreement from both the GNC and his government to proceed. In response to these failed integration efforts, a number of revolutionary brigades formed regional coalitions. These coalitions received a unified name and formal recognition as security forces under the Chief of Staff, becoming the Libyan Shield Forces (LSF). Like the SSC, the LSF was undermined by divided loyalties and excessive power wielded by unit commanders.

Despite the LSF's autonomy, the government remains heavily reliant on it for security. In August 2013, the GNC ordered more than a thousand armed vehicles carrying Libya Shield troops into Tripoli to improve the security situation. The GNC has also deployed the Libya Shield to military zones in the south to conduct border security operations. However, the LSF's undisciplined fighters and their tenuous allegiance to the central government have made the GNC eager to disband the group.

The GNC has attempted to institute several laws to drawdown the capacity and influence of militia forces. In June 2013, it adopted a resolution that requested Zeidan present a plan to the GNC with a "specific and clear cut timeline for the integration on an individual basis of all armed groups that were granted legitimacy into the Libyan army." The resolution also called on the prime minister to take practical measures to put an end to the physical presence of all brigades and illegal armed groups, authorizing him to use force if necessary.²

In response, Prime Minister Zeidan announced Resolution 362 to create a National Guard, which aimed to bring the Libya Shield under closer control of the government. The National Guard was conceived as a two-year project during which members would perform internal policing functions. At the end of the proposed timeframe, members would either be moved into the regular armed forces or offered alternative employment. The remaining National Guard would then become a national reserve force. However, the GNC opposed the idea, forcing Zeidan's government to abandon the initiative.

In the aftermath of this proposal, little progress has been made. While the GNC has approved a decision transferring 424 million Libyan Dinars from the reserve of the general budget to cover some of the expenses related to the salaries of the army, and Zeidan has raised the salaries of the regular police and army, countering the militias' reluctance to join the national army and give up their independence remains a challenge.

Recently, Zeidan has backed a plan to establish a "General Purpose Force (GPF)," a joint effort to train and equip a new Libyan army by the United States, AFRICOM, Italy, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The force reportedly consists of up to 20,000 troops, who will receive six-to-twelve weeks of training.³ Critics have questioned, however, whether the force's mandate to exclude militia members is divorced from Libya's security realities, skeptical of the GPF's ability to respond to emerging threats absent militia support.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Libya's insecurity has affected progress in other areas. The economy has suffered greatly due to the central government's inability to exert control over the means of oil production. The government's shortcomings have allowed competing tribes and ethnic groups to vie for power over oil and gas resources in the region. One of the more powerful militias in the east, the federalist militia under Ibrahim al-Jathran, has closed oilfields and ports, claiming to protect Libya's oil from the corrupt elites in Tripoli. Al-Jathran allegedly heads a force of 17,000. Al-Jathran's militia now controls facilities that

account for 60 percent of Libya's oil wealth. Meanwhile, copycat movements have emerged in the west and south, causing production to drop from 1.13 million barrels per day in June to around below 300,000 barrels in October 2013. This has cost the government almost over \$5 billion in revenue since August 2013 alone.

The government's inability to marshal control over its resources has allowed militias to play a disproportionate role in influencing the trajectory of Libya's transition. With Zeidan's kidnapping and the forced passing of the Political Isolation Law serving as stark examples, dangerous precedents have been set. The use of violence and coercion to influence legislation and undermine the central government will obstruct any constructive steps that the government tries to make in improving the security situation. Furthermore, militias are threatening the territorial integrity of Libya. Eastern militias have announced the creation of their own oil company to sell crude oil from the fields and terminals they currently occupy, while political leaders have declared a regional government. However, support for the federalists is not necessarily an endorsement of autonomy, but rather, a response to the central government's absence. One diplomat commented: "If the government can sort out security and spending money, I think federalism will fall away quickly."⁴

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

To its credit, the international community has marshalled considerable resources in support of Libya's security sector. The United States has mobilized an estimated \$189 million to assist Libya since its revolution, though only a fraction of that has been devoted to the security sector. Approximately \$6.45 million has been devoted to justice sector reform, export control and border security, and militia integration efforts. In addition, \$18.5 million has been programmed to Libya from the Global Security Contingency Fund, a joint State Department and Department of Defense effort designed to "address rapidly changing, transnational, asymmetric threats, and emergent opportunities." Of the \$18.5 million, four million was tabbed for cross-ministerial border security. In September 2012, nine Libyan officials traveled to Washington under the State Department's Export Control and Related

Border Security program to visit several sites in Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Arizona to learn about "strategic planning, integrated border management, and the importance of training academies." The U.S. also recently committed to training between 5,000-8,000 troops for the aforementioned General Purpose Force.

Meanwhile, the European Union has allocated funds through a number of different initiatives, including €10 million for a security sector reform and rule of law program, €5 million for physical security and stockpile management, and the €30 million Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission, among others. Individual European nations have also stepped up security assistance: Italy has committed to training 5,000 soldiers and pledged significant financial assistance; the United Kingdom will provide training for up to 2,000 soldiers and a £62.5 million security, justice, and defence program; and France has offered "to bring contributions to the sovereign tools of the Libyan state, especially on securing borders."

International bodies have also played an integral role. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) established the Security Sector Advisory and Coordination Division in July 2012 to provide consultation and, where appropriate, coordinate international security efforts. Additionally, the African Union has also coordinated with Libya on border security, developing the Tripoli Plan of Action "to identify gaps in border control and best practices ... [and to] agree on medium and long-term measures to address such gaps and develop enhanced modalities of communication among the border agencies."⁵

The international community attempted to coordinate these efforts during the February 2013 International Ministerial Conference on Support for Libya, which focused on security, justice, and the rule of law. Nearly a dozen states participated, including the U.S., United Kingdom, Turkey, Spain, France, Italy, and Germany, as did representatives from the United Nations, African Union, Gulf Cooperation Council, European Union, and the League of Arab States, among others. Conference participants agreed "on the need for immediate, visible, and tangible action..."

on the priority challenges in the areas of national security and justice.” Participants also pledged additional assistance to identified priority areas and “committed themselves to realign their assistance in order to advance [Libya’s security priorities].” However, a follow up meeting has yet to be scheduled to assess stated commitments and progress related to ongoing efforts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The Obama administration should work with Congress to allocate pre-existing funds in the Global Security Contingency Fund (GSCF) to provide additional security assistance to Libya.** The GSCF is a joint program between the Department of Defense and the State Department that authorizes a fund of up to \$450 million for border security, internal defense, counterterrorism, rule of law, and security sector reform. In light of a constrained fiscal environment and Congressional resistance to Libya aid following the Benghazi attacks, the administration should take advantage of previously authorized GSCF funds, valid through fiscal year 2015. To date, \$18.5 million has been programmed to Libya from this account, and these funds have been used almost exclusively for counterterrorism and border security. The U.S. should consider using GSCF funds to bolster the full range of security forces, not limited to counterterrorism and border security, with an emphasis on rule of law and security sector reform.
2. **The U.S. should work with international partners to ensure delivery of security-related commitments made to Libya during the International Ministerial Conference on Support to Libya in Paris and schedule a follow-up meeting.** It is imperative that security-related pledges made during the 2012 meeting are delivered. The U.S. should coordinate with allies and partners to discuss progress and plans. In particular, donors should evaluate progress made on the two plans adopted at the International Ministerial Conference: the National Security Development Plan and the Justice and Rule of Law Development Plan. The U.S. should also encourage greater transparency and coordination between the U.S. and the EU in order to minimize duplication of efforts and maximize the efficiency of allocated resources. Finally, although Italy offered to convene the next ministerial meeting, no date has been set for that conference. The U.S. should encourage Italy to follow-up on its promise in order to assess the progress that has been made in the past year and highlight areas where development has been lacking, particularly on security sector reform.
3. **The U.S. should encourage European Union counterparts to allow increased transparency regarding the pledges it has made in support of Libya’s security sector reform.** While the EU has made generous pledges and initiated several programs to support Libya’s security sector, there has been a lack of official documentation demonstrating how much of the pledges have reached Libya thus far and how the programs are translating into tangible results. The U.S. should work with partners to encourage greater transparency and coordinate efforts, and encourage the EU to be transparent in its evaluation of programs. This will allow the U.S. and the EU to identify areas where the programs have been successful and where increased development is required.
4. **The U.S. should coordinate with the United Nations Security Council to review the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) security mandate.** UNSMIL is tasked by the Security Council to help restore “public security,” but it has struggled to provide the necessary strategic and technical advice and assistance to the transitional government. The UN body should reassess its strategy and revisit its mandate. This should include an effort to move beyond exclusive support for the Ministry of Defense and Office of the Army Chief of Staff through the engagement of new activities, such as closer monitoring of centers of training outside of Libya.
5. **NATO should expand its advisory role in security sector reform, while avoiding antagonizing other armed groups.** In October, NATO approved a Libyan request to provide advice on SSR-related issues. Though

the advisory group will only consist of a small team in Brussels, the U.S. should consider leveraging NATO's expertise to develop new training programs. These programs do not necessarily require NATO branding and could be held in member states, such as Albania, Belgium, or the Czech Republic.

NOTES

¹ International Crisis Group (ICG), "Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts," Middle East/North Africa Report No. 130, September 14, 2012: 14.

² Full text of the resolution available at "Eye on GNC" (Twelfth Report), <http://www.ignc.net.ly/the-twelfth-report/>.

³ Fredric Wehrey and Peter Cole, "Building Libya's Security Sector," Carnegie Endowment

for International Peace, Policy Outlook, August 6, 2013: 4, accessed November 12, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/building_libya_security.pdf

⁴ Suleiman Al-Khalidi and Patrick Markey, "Analysis – Chaotic Oil Power Libya Far From Partition," *Reuters*, October 7, 2013, accessed on November 12, 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/10/07/uk-libya-autonomy-analysis-idUKBRE99609A20131007>

⁵ African Union, "Enhancing Operational Land Border Security Cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan Region," September 5, 2013, accessed on November 12, 2013, <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc-concl-tripoli-meeting-05-09-2013.pdf>



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