

## Which Choices for the Lybia's Final Opportunity?\*

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### Introduction

After the fall of the Gaddafi regime there was - allegedly - a great opportunity to make Libya a role model for other states in the region.<sup>2</sup> For various reasons this opportunity is gone. There are several indications that Libya is on the way to a lengthy civil war.<sup>3</sup> Some kind of Lebanonization could be the destiny of the country.

As probably everybody is aware an unstable Libya could have a significant negative impact to the region and also to our own countries.

No single European country is able to influence the developments in Libya in a positive way decisively on its own. But it is necessary that one or a few nations step forward and take the lead. And it is necessary to keep the Americans on board.

So, which strategic options are on hand?

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<sup>2</sup> See Wolfgang Puzstai, "Libya: A Country on the Brink. Root Causes of the Current Situation and Possible Solutions," ISPI Policy Briefs, No. 226, March 2014, <http://www.ispionline.it/en/node/9931> .

<sup>3</sup> See Wolfgang Puzstai, "Armed Groups in Libya after the Elections – What can be expected?" ISPI Commentary, June 25, 2014; <http://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/armed-groups-libya-after-elections-what-can-be-expected-10720> and Wolfgang Puzstai, Misrata's next steps: narrowing the window to save Libya, "Navisio Global LLC, September 2014, <https://www.navisioglobal.com/publishing.html> .

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## Strategic Interests

As strategic interests are driving a strategy, they must be clearly identified. With regard to Libya the strategic interests of the USA and Europe are not identical. Even within Europe they differ significantly, e.g. between Italy and Finland. Whereas some European countries have vital security and economic interests in or in relation to Libya, this is not the case for all the EU-states or the USA. Probably the Americans have direct interests only in connection to fighting terrorism, but even those are not vital. Therefore they will not risk the life of their soldiers on the ground. There is of course also the common interest of value preservation / value promotion, but this does not justify taking high risks.

## Military options for Libya's neighbors

Within the strategic context the interests of Libya's neighbors must be correctly assessed to understand their intentions. It is important to take also their military options into account.

The southern neighbors Niger and Chad don't have the capabilities for a major intervention in Libya, but we need to keep in mind that the majority of the southern Toubou tribe lives in Chad. It can be expected that they will support their northern brothers in a full-fledged civil war. There is credible information that some limited assistance is already going on right now.

Although Sudan shares only a small part of its border with Libya it plays some role. There is evidence that Sudan, a country with quite a history in supporting radical Islamic groups and international terrorism, is supplying weapons, ammunition and military equipment to Islamist groups in Libya.

Algeria's major strategic interest with regard to Libya is most likely preventing arms smuggling and the intrusion of terrorists. The country's constitution forbids its forces undertaking operations abroad. From my point of view a major Algerian intervention can be ruled out, even by air force means. An assessment of the terrain in the border zone - which consists with the exception of the southernmost part mainly of open desert - shows that Algeria's strategic interests can be also protected by the well-equipped Algerian Armed Forces through a dense border security system. Nevertheless there are indications that a few limited covert operations are going on in Libya. Probably those are related to intelligence gathering only, although I would not rule out some minor direct action activities.

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Tunisia has close links with Libya. The wages of several 10.000 Tunisians working in Libya is an important source of income, in particular for many families in the poorer regions of the country. On the other side probably by far more than 100.000 Libyans live now in Tunisia as refugees. Smuggling, including weapons smuggling, infiltration of terrorists and links of Tunisia's Ansar al-Sharia to the western branch of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya are of major concern to Tunisia. Even if Tunisia, a country with about twice the population of Libya, would have the military power to intervene in Libya, this would more endanger Tunisia's strategic interests than facilitate it. Therefore I would also rule out a Tunisian military intervention in Libya.

With regard to Egypt the situation is quite different. Egypt's security is heavily affected by the situation in Libya. There are strong economic ties between the two countries. Until the 20th century the Cyrenaica was always more leaning towards Egypt than towards Tripoli. Terrorists are using Libyan territory as a training ground, logistic base and staging area for attacks in Egypt. If the number and intensity of these attacks grows further on, it can be expected that Egypt will intensify its border security and eventually establish a security zone on the Libyan side of the border. This could also include surgical strikes on terrorist targets further in the west of the Cyrenaica.

A radical Islamist state on its eastern border is a nightmare for Egypt. Therefore it is supporting the al-Thinni government and Operation Dignity as much as necessary to prevent the take-over of the Cyrenaica by the Islamist.

One thing is for sure, as security is of primary concern for the Egyptians, they cannot have an interest in a long-term escalation of the situation in Libya.

## **Tools of strategy**

The strategists must have a realistic understanding of the available means, the so-called instruments of state power. Those include various diplomatic, informational, economic and military tools. It must be clear which of them are made available by the states and to what extent.

## **Strategic objectives**

The triangle of the strategic context, the strategic interests and the available means leads to the strategic objectives which should exploit eventual opportunities and face the risks.

From my point of view there are two general possibilities for a strategic objective with regard to Libya:

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## Possibility 1: Fostering a successful transition process

The aim of this transition process must be a stable, democratic Libya that is able to benefit from its natural resources to promote socio-economic development for its population and prevent terrorists and organized crime networks from using its territory to stage operations.

## Possibility 2: "Accepting" the Lebanonization of the country while containing the conflict and mitigating the risks

The second possible objective could be enough for the Americans to pursue their interests and face the risks for themselves. But most probably this would not be sufficient for the Europeans, in particular the southern countries of the continent, and Libya's neighbors.

## Strategy options for the West

All this leads to four potential courses of action (CoA):<sup>4</sup>

### CoA A) Continue more or less as now

This would mean that the current escalation is not directly dealt with, but dialogue and negotiations would be emphasized to find solutions for the various, numerous problems.

This could work, in particular if Qatar, Turkey, the UAE and some other specific countries could be motivated to use their influence in a more positive way.

### CoA B) Containment and risk mitigation

The borders could be sealed from outside as tight as possible. Humanitarian support would be delivered to the suffering populations wherever feasible and affordable. Surgical strikes would be conducted on terrorist targets and eventually one party of the civil war could be directly supported.

We must be aware that this would mean that the international community accepts its failure in Libya and that the European and regional interests could be pursued only to a limited extent!

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<sup>4</sup> See W. Pusztaï, "A Western Strategy for Libya", The German Marshall Fund of the United States & Istituto Affari Internazionali, Opinions on the Mediterranean, June 2014, <http://www.gmfus.org/archives/a-western-strategy-for-libya/> , <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=1128> .

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## CoA C) Investing in a significantly enhanced state building support

This means a step-by-step approach as it is not realistic that all the tasks of state building could be achieved at the same time everywhere. At first it would be necessary to focus on the capital.

The highest priorities for the support would be as follows:

- strengthening security organizations, including the police, the military, border guards, and perhaps paramilitary forces ("National Guard")
- setting up a functioning institutional framework including all different sectors, such as the public administration, the executive, the legislature (with particular attention to the constitution-making process). and the judiciary with the overall aim of ensuring good governance
- supporting the building of civil society, in particular trade unions, private voluntary organizations, and political parties
- reforming the economic structure by ensuring at first the continued profitable exploitation of hydrocarbon resources, while at the same time pursuing strategies to diversify the economy and fight corruption
- promoting infrastructure development and the smooth provision of basic services.

The whole process would be accompanied by a reconciliation process, first locally and subsequently nation-wide, and DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration). It is obvious that a certain amount of security and stability is a precondition for this course of action.

## CoA D) Diplomatic pressure, focused sanctions and eventually a limited Peace Support Operation (PSO)

Diplomatic pressure from the IC and focused sanctions should force the al-Hassi government to give up. Being as inclusive as possible they should be also used to bring the most important more or less democratic oriented factions to the negotiation table. A ceasefire in northern Tripolitania is the immediate goal.

With regard to sanctions it must be kept in mind that Misrata is as a harbor city very much dependent on trade. In the mid-term focused sanctions could hurt the city a lot. On the other side the al-Thinni government needs the international recognition to stay in "power" and should therefore be also susceptible to pressure.

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It could be necessary to enforce a ceasefire in and around the capital with the help of an international intervention.<sup>5</sup> Deploying such a limited PSO is a last-resort-option. It would focus on establishing the safe & secure environment for CoA C (significantly enhanced state building support).

Among the preconditions for such a PSO are a ceasefire at least in northern Tripolitania, an invitation backed by the vast majority of the legitimate representation of the Libyans and a mandate by the UN or a regional organization.

The PSO would be conducted in the capital area only and for a limited period of time. The objective would be the stabilization of the situation in and around Tripoli to allow the consolidation of the government and the build-up of security forces. It is crucial to prevent the government from getting blackmailed every other day and to establish a safe and secure environment for state building at least in the capital. The subsequent expansion of the "security & prosperity bubble" must be ensured by the Libyans themselves.

As mentioned, a military intervention is a last-resort-option, but there will be only a narrow window of opportunity for launching such an operation. As the preparation takes a lot of time it is necessary to start the political discussion, consultations and concrete contingency planning as soon as possible.

## Conclusion

In order to develop a promising strategy an in-depth analysis needs to include:

- the strategic context;
- the strategic ends (interests and objectives of the various players, including ourselves);
- the available means to implement a strategy;
- the feasible ways / Courses of Action

For the successful implementation of the selected strategy a coordinated application of various tools will be essential. This "concert" includes diplomacy, economy (including sanctions), information (including training & education) and military.

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<sup>5</sup> See Wolfgang Puzstai, "Libya – Time for an International Intersection?," ISPI Policy Briefs, No. 227, September 2014, <http://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/libya-time-international-intervention-11239> and Wolfgang Puzstai, "An International Stabilization Force for Libya?," Atlantic Council – MENASource, 17 August, 2014, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/an-international-stabilization-force-for-libya> .

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A combination of Sun Tzu's "Art of War" (with regard to shaping the environment) and Niccolò Machiavelli's "Il Principe" (whenever decisive action is required) will be necessary to influence Libya's future to the better.

In a nutshell, it is time for difficult strategic decisions, but they are urgent, as time is running out. The longer the current civil-war like situation is prolonged the more difficult it will be to achieve a lasting stabilization & reconciliation.