

## AFTER GADDAFI



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One of the great successes of the Gaddafi regime in Libya was to make sure that no alternative leadership could emerge. It achieved this not so much by brutal repression, although there has been plenty of that, but by preventing alternative institutions from developing in the political sphere. This was particularly the case within the arena between the state and the family that in most countries – even in neighbouring liberal autocracies – is filled by civil society. Some institutions did remain but they were either tied to the regime or controlled by it.

### Institutions and interests

Two may prove to be significant in the post-Gaddafi era; (1) the tribally-based Collective Social Leadership which knitted tribal leaders into a web of collective responsibility for tribal members, and (2) the old Union of Free Officers, composed of veterans who participated in the Revolution in 1969, many of whom strongly disapprove of what the Gaddafi regime has done. Legal autonomous collective action outside these bodies simply did not exist. Other alter-

natives, where they did exist, were essentially either clandestine or exiled abroad.

The former are represented by the organised religious opposition to the regime, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Both have been decimated by the regime but not destroyed. The latter consists of those groups that were established in Europe and the US after 1973, of which the most prominent is the Front for the Salvation of Libya, formed in 1980 by Mohamed al-Magariaf. There are many others, ranging in sentiment from secularists to Islamists and from royalists to republicans.

Tribal groups as such may no longer have quite the clout that they did in the past – the regime, after all, tried to destroy them in the 1970s – but tribal ethos is still important and this will give tribal leaderships a role in whatever regime emerges in the wake of the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. This means that some of the antagonisms that have developed over the past forty years will persist, potentially setting the tribes of Cyrenaica against those of Sirtica while the tribes of Tripolitania will stand aside from such conflict. One group that will certainly lose power (and may therefore be a threat to future stability as a source of irredentist Gaddafism) is the Qadhafha-Maghraha-Warfalla coalition.

Religious groups cannot be ignored either. The Brotherhood is unlikely to take a political role as such but its values are widely shared throughout Libya and political parties may well emerge reflecting its values and objectives. They are likely to receive considerable support. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group contingent has been released from prison, having renounced its Salafi-jihadi agenda. Its members, however, have been willing to put their expertise at the disposal of the National Transitional Council in

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Benghazi in an individual capacity and the group itself does not seem to be reforming. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb has also been cited as a potential spoiler in Libya. In fact, an early attempt to infiltrate the country was foiled and since then the group has been taking arms and weapons out of Libya instead. It is unlikely to play any role at all.

The position of the Union of Free Officers is unknown and, although they may form a pressure group, their membership is elderly and many of them – such as the rijal al-khima ('the men of the tent' – Colonel Gaddafi's closest confidants) – too compromised by their association with the Gaddafi regime. The exiled groups will undoubtedly seek roles in any new regime but they suffer from the fact that they have been abroad for up to thirty years or more. Some will certainly find new roles: Colonel Khalifa Haftar has already been recalled from the US, where he had been living in exile after renouncing the regime in the wake of its defeat in Chad in 1987. He is now engaged in trying to create a credible military force in Cyrenaica.

## Existing forces

Then there are those who have renounced the regime in the wake of the current insurgency. The ambassadorial core abroad has seen significant defections, from the foreign minister, Moussa Koussa, to the ambassador to the United Nations, Abdurrahman Shalgam. There have also been defections from within the administrative core of the regime, such as Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, the former justice minister formally in charge in Benghazi, and the former interior minister, Abdel Fattah Younes al-Abidi. These will form an important well of administrative and diplomatic expertise on which any new regime must rely.

Certain groups will have no place at all. Top of the list will be Colonel Gaddafi himself and his immediate family, despite Turkish, African Union and other diplomatic initiatives to rehabilitate some, if not all, of them. In one sense this is a tragic irony because the one voice in Libya calling for democratic transition and taking concrete steps in that direction in recent years has been Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. He has, however, disqualified himself by his enthusiastic support for his father's brutal crackdown on the rebels at the start of the insurgency.

The irony here is doubled by the fact that he had also been the patron of a significant group of Libyan intellectuals trying to plan reform even under the Gaddafi regime. Their values reflected those of the educated urban elites now emerging as an urban middle class, particularly in Tripoli but also in Benghazi around fig-

ures such as Zahi Mogherbi and Amal al-Obeidi. They found an echo in the administrative elites, which, although they may have served the regime for years, did not necessarily accept its values or projects. Both groups represent an essential resource for the future, and will certainly take part in a future government.

## Scenarios for the future

Three scenarios have been proposed for Libya in the future: (1) the Gaddafi regime is restored to power; (2) Libya becomes a failing state; and (3) some kind of pluralistic government emerges in a reunified state. The possibility that Libya remains, as at present, a divided state between East and West has been excluded because there is a general view inside the country that this must not happen. Although it might be a temporary consequence of scenario (1), it is resisted because almost certainly it would result in two satrapies, one depending on Egypt (Cyrenaica) and the other on Algeria and/or Tunisia (Tripolitania and the Fezzan).

### (1) *The regime survives*

This outcome, of course, is implicit in the African Union peace plan and has been rejected by the National Transitional Council in Eastern Libya precisely because it would mean that the Gaddafi regime would be seen as a legitimate negotiating partner. This is something that the insurgency refuses to contemplate, so a negotiated path to regime survival is not possible, even in the imaginative scenarios proposed by Saif-al-Islam Gaddafi.

The alternative is that the regime imposes itself by main force. It is extremely difficult to imagine this as an outcome because Libyan special forces are simply too small and have suffered considerable attrition at the hands of the Coalition's no-fly zone policies – 30 percent of their armour and heavy weaponry is now said to have been destroyed. This leaves the third option that the country remains divided but this also, in the long run, will not be tolerable as it creates a political vacuum that neither side will accept and both will seek to correct, by main force if possible.

### (2) *A failed state*

It has been argued that, as a result of the violence, Libya will degenerate into a failed state in which tribal factions will constantly challenge each other for supreme power, with no faction enjoying sufficient force to dominate. This assumes that Libyan politics has been frozen in tribal stasis for the past forty years. The assumption is incorrect: although tribes still exert

considerable power, their powerbase is rural and Libya is a predominantly urban society in which tribal ethos, as mentioned above, may be important, but has to compete with other forms of collective identity.

As part of this scenario, it is argued that the Sirtican tribes – the Qadhadhfa, the Warfalla and the Maghraha – have a major investment in the regime and they will provide the drive for the collapse of the Libyan state, particularly against the tribes of Cyrenaica. It is true that the original revolution represented a reversal of tribal power with formerly subservient tribes coming to dominate their previous masters. It is also true that resentment continues to fester today as a result of this forty-year-old reversal. However, the unity of the three Sirtican tribes is not guaranteed – the Warfalla were victimised after the failed Bani Walid coup in 1993 and the Maghraha have never shown the same kind of loyalty to the regime as the Qadhadhfa. And the latter are a small tribe, whose power derives only from their close connections with the ruling regime.

It is much more likely that the Warfalla and, probably, the Maghraha will see that their interests are best served by turning against the regime – one faction of the Warfalla, indeed, declared for the insurgency originally. This would leave the Qadhadhfa isolated and it would lack the power to impose itself alone. In other words, the Cyrenaica insurgency will probably be able to quash any potential threat to a unified state once the regime is toppled, thus avoiding the Libyan state collapsing into chaos. In addition, most of the Tripoline tribes have not committed themselves to the regime. They are waiting to see who comes out on top but they also know that the Gaddafi regime, having lost control of half the country, is no longer a credible political force.

### (3) *A pluralistic outcome*

The third possibility is that, in some way, the Gaddafi regime collapses and a new pluralistic political system emerges from the ashes. The regime is likely to collapse precisely because it has lost credibility and those still supporting it decide to cut their losses and cease to support the regime. The Arab press has reported that the regime is now so fearful of further high-level defections that it has sequestered major political figures in the Bab al-Aziziyah barracks – Colonel Gaddafi's home – and that it has already had to put down one rebellion by junior officers quartered there. How reliable such reports are is not clear but in the paranoid atmosphere that must exist in the upper echelons of the Libyan regime, they do have some credibility.

If, then, a new political system were to emerge, the likelihood is that it would be pluralistic in nature simply because there is no credible military force available to figures outside the regime to impose a dictatorship and those forces available to regime figures are too small to make such an outcome effective. This will particularly be the case if the Eastern-based National Transitional Council achieves success in over-turning the regime for it knows that it cannot, as presently constituted, claim to represent the totality of Libyans, not least because of ancient tribal tensions between East, Centre and West. The likely appearance of such a new political system is described below.

## A new government

That leaves the question of what such a new government will look like. There is, first of all, going to have to be a transitional administration. This will not necessarily be the National Transitional Council in Benghazi as it may be too heavily weighed towards Cyrenaica for Tripoline tastes. Almost certainly it will be modified by the inclusion of figures from Tripolitania and will include those incipient civil society institutions that were beginning to emerge, often based on lawyers' associations – they, after all, sparked off the insurgency in Benghazi. It will not have formal democratic legitimacy but it will be forced to create a political arena in which elections for a constitutional assembly could take place within a matter of months.

The new constitution – at least one draft already exists – will then have to be approved by referendum so that parliamentary elections will be possible. What legislative institutions will be proposed by the constitution is not clear. Furthermore, what the elections will produce is virtually impossible to predict as all the above groups and interests will compete for power. What will emerge, despite having, no doubt, a formal similarity to democratic systems elsewhere, will represent a coalition of other interests – tribal and ethnic (the Berbers of the Jabal Nafusa have their own resentments), religious, urban elites and business (there is already a nascent private sector) – struggling for primacy. It will not include the Gaddafi clan or their tribal supporters and it will represent an uneasy compromise between West and East, between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, with the Fezzan holding the balance and Sirtica being isolated.

Its stability in the early years may be uncertain until all groups accept that their interests will be guaranteed within a pluralistic political system. Some groups will be disappointed to find themselves marginalised – supporters of the Gaddafi regime, for example and, probably the royalists. Despite the fact that the flag

of monarchical Libya has become the symbol of the Eastern insurgents, the monarchy was never popular in Tripolitania and the Fezzan and the federal republican structure it introduced was seen to have favoured the East of the country. Nor is the army likely to play a major role; it has been too marginalised by the Gaddafi regime and the brutality of its specialist units against civilians too egregious for that.

In short, the future in Libya is extremely difficult to discern and that, too, has been the ultimate triumph of the Gaddafi regime. It ensured that there should be no potential alternative and the legacy it bequeathes

to the country it saw as the ultimate political laboratory will be chaos and uncertainty. What can the European Union do to help such a difficult and uncertain birth of a new political system for Libya? Libyans will not welcome patronising advice, or predesigned schemata for economic and political reform. What they will need and welcome is technical advice on how to achieve their goals, not what those goals should be, together with the short-term financial support they will need to achieve them until the consequences of the current sanctions regime have disappeared.

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