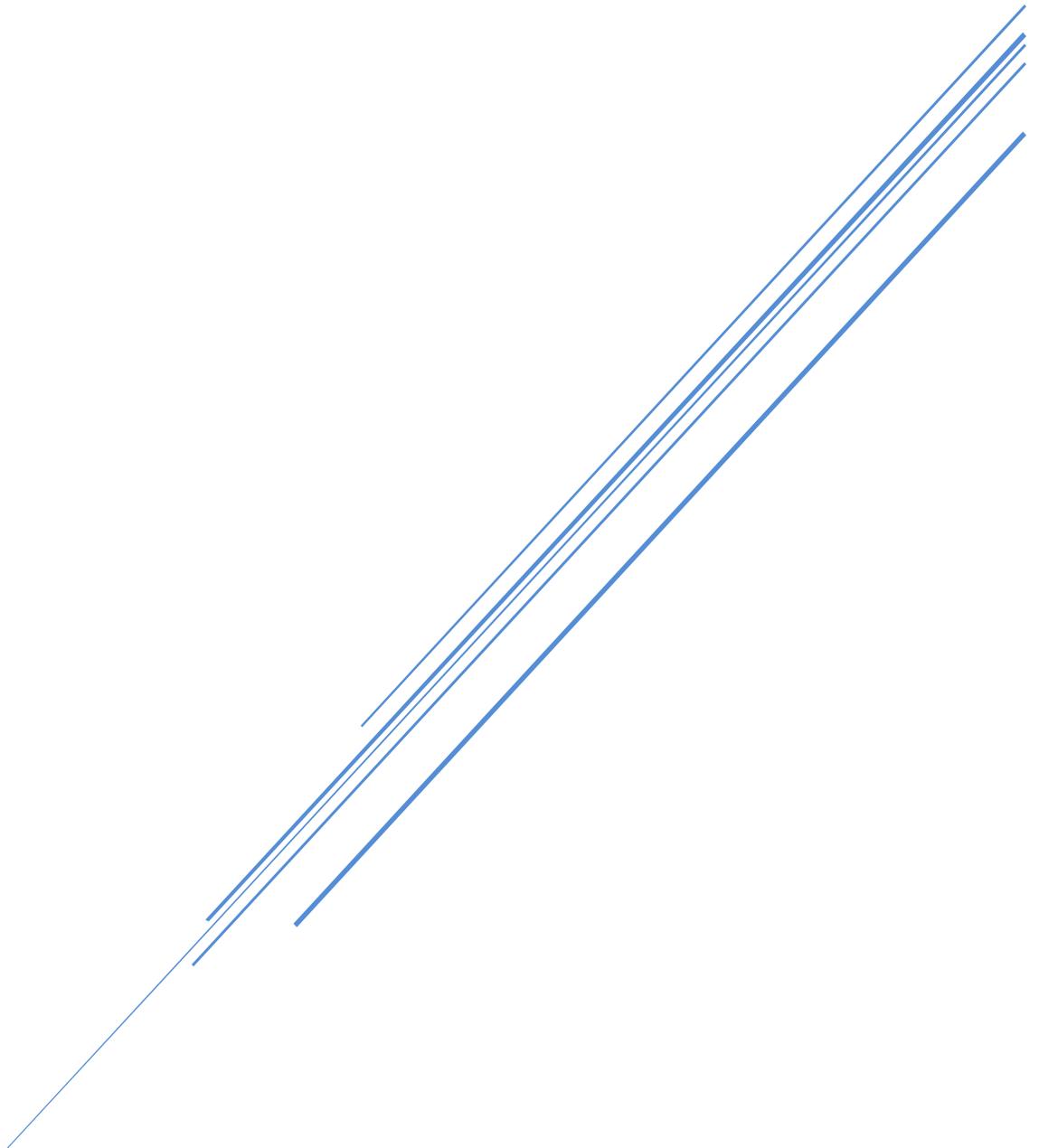


A FAILED MODEL?

NATO's Limited Intervention in Libya



19/06/2014
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Preface

05/08/2014

Almost three years after the overthrow of Qaddafi, Libya looks set to descend into civil war. The recent withdrawal of the British embassy illustrates the stark failure of NATO's limited intervention in Libya. This paper seeks to understand precisely what went wrong in Libya, and sets out three policy pathways for the United Kingdom.

A Failed Model? NATO's Limited Intervention in Libya

When Operation Ellamy was launched in March 2011, France, the United Kingdom and the United States were resolute that there would be no mission creep. Instead, the NATO campaign would operate under UN Security Council Resolution 1973 to prevent a humanitarian disaster, remove Qaddafi from power, but allow the country's existing capacity to provide reconstruction. This limited approach was heralded as the new model to foreign intervention.

By October 20, 2011 Qaddafi had been captured and killed, fuelling confidence in this new approach and optimism about the future of Libya. However, three years on this optimism has faded as Libya now lacks security, stability and prosperity.

The decision to intervene lightly in Libya was predicated on several assumptions. It was believed that Libya would have the oil revenue to finance reconstruction, and that it had the organisational capacity to carry out this process and attract foreign investment. It was further assumed that rival factions would put their differences aside in favour of a single national identity, and identity which could bind Libya together on the path to democratic liberalisation. A fledging economy, dysfunctional bureaucracy and increasing regional divides have meant that these assumptions were flawed.

Libya's current predicament was inevitable; Britain and France failed to consider what would happen in Libya after the NATO campaign. The failure to consider Libya's future has meant that Libya now lacks a functioning state, security force, economy, and any sense of nationalism.

Failed State

Libyan legislative and executive power lies with the General National Congress (GNC). A record turnout in the 2012 elections created a high degree of optimism for the GNC, but this has since dissipated due to political gridlock. Whilst the secular National Forces Alliance (NFA) won the largest proportion of the votes in 2012, the UK failed to appreciate the growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Construction Party (JCP). This has led the GNC to have

become consumed by parochial debates and partisan politics on important issues such as the constitution-drafting process.

To add further complexity to the political context, there are many militias who remain on the government payroll. Rival militias, such as Zintana and Misrata, surround Tripoli and regularly disrupt political meetings. This has slowed the political decision-making process down and has created a dysfunctional GNC.

Militias have also facilitated the rising influence of the JCP through intimidation of independent candidates. It is against this backdrop of a rising Islamist influence and growing militia intimidation that has led to the re-emergence of the former General Khalifa Haftar. Haftar, with support of the majority of Libyan army chiefs, has declared war on terrorists through 'Operation Dignity'. Thus far, he was convinced the Libyan Supreme Court that the election of Ahmed Maiteeq was unconstitutional, and has succeeded in reinstating al-Thinni as caretaker Prime Minister.

Failed Security

Haftar has chosen to act militarily due to the lack of an effective national security force. Working alongside the US and Italy, the UK pledged to train 2000 troops in Bassingbourne as part of the training of a Libyan 'general purpose force'. However, the training was delayed for over a year due to disputes over who should pay and has suffered from a lack of operational buy-in. The most significant problem is that the training is separate from the United Nation's Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). It is normally the role of the UN to oversee security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), but the two approaches have been divorced. This has led to a lack of cohesion among western policy-makers and an elusive SSR.

Despite the help of the European Union's Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), Libya continues to struggle with the existence of large swathes of ungoverned space and porous borders. The UK's contribution of just 4 "seconded experts" demonstrates how low a priority it is perceived to

be.¹ These ungoverned spaces do affect the UK. This was demonstrated most forcefully during the In Amenas Hostage Crisis in January 2013, which resulted in the deaths of 6 British foreign workers.

Following the fall of Qaddafi, Libya became awash with weapons which have subsequently fallen into the hands of militias. It is thought that there are approximately 15,000 man-portable, surface-to-air missiles unaccounted for.² These weapons are now being sold to terrorists fighting in Mali, the Sinai and Syria. EUBAM's failure to secure Libya's vast borders has allowed this trend to continue. Although terrorism poses no existential threat to the UK, it is a growing threat. The political fall-out of allowing a NATO campaign to have led to a country being a breeding ground for terrorism would be severe.

One of the main revenue streams for terrorist groups is migration. According to the EU border agency, Frontex, 42, 000 people have illegally attempted to cross the Mediterranean to Italy since January.³ These migrants are not just Libyans, but from countries such as Eritrea, Somalia and Nigeria. Many crossings result in multiple casualties. Libya's interior minister, Salah Mazek, has become so frustrated with the fatalities that he has recently warned Tripoli may "facilitate" the transit of refugees to southern Europe.⁴ This is both a refugee and humanitarian crisis and it threatens to overwhelm Europe. The UK must take on a greater responsibility in this crisis, as European interests are closely tied to those of the UK.

Lastly, the lack of an effective national security force has also meant that the majority of Libya's oil ports are now controlled by anti-Government forces. The inability of the state to retain ownership of the eastern oil ports has meant that the state has minimal oil revenue to finance vital fiscal reforms.

¹ , 'The UK's Response to Extremism and Instability in North and West Africa,' *Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's Seventeenth Report of the Session 2013-2014* (May 2014).

² A. Kupperman, 'Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene', Policy Brief, *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, (September 2013).

³ D. Barrett, 'Illegal immigration to Europe shows sharp rise', *The Daily Telegraph*, 30th May 2014.

⁴ 'Libya threatens EU over African migrants', *Al Jazeera*, 11th May 2014.

Failed Economy

Libya has the largest proven oil reserves and the fourth largest proven gas reserves in Africa. Most significantly, Europe is their primary export market and so the current disruption threatens Europe's energy security. A close relationship with a strong Libyan energy market would also provide an opportunity for greater flexibility in light of an increasingly belligerent Russia. In this respect, energy security is the UK's foremost strategic interest in Libya.

The Libyan energy market is too weak to fulfil its OPEC quota; since anti-Government forces occupied the eastern oil ports, exports have fallen from 1.4 million barrels per day to just 155 000 and at a cost of over \$17.8 billion.⁵ The currency is in danger of collapsing, and so the government desperately needs oil revenue.

There are deeper problems than the lack of oil revenue, however. There is a lack of physical and organisational infrastructure which continues to deter foreign investment. Roads, hospitals and schools have still not been rebuilt after a damaging civil war, and there is estimated to be a 500 000 shortfall in housing by 2020.⁶ This is compounded by a lack of organisational infrastructure, particularly the failure to effectively produce revenue streams. A lack of accountability, transparency and efficiency prevents oil revenue from being generated and deters foreign investors.

Finally, a more intrinsic problem to the Libyan economy can be identified due to its over-reliance on the energy sector. The IMF calculated that hydro-carbon industry accounted for 90% of government revenue and 95% of export revenue in 2012.⁷ The economy requires a more diversified growth if it is to achieve long-term economic stability.

⁵ Dow Jones Business News, 'Oil Outages Cost Libya \$17.8 Billion', *Nasdaq*, May 29 2014, taken from <http://www.nasdaq.com/article/oil-outages-cost-libya-178-billion-20140529-00241> (last accessed 18/06/2014)

⁶ 'Libya to invest \$140 billion in projects over the next decade', *Libya Herald*, 1 June 2013, taken from <http://www.libyaherald.com/2013/06/01/libya-to-invest-140-billion-in-projects-over-the-next-decade/#axzz351LVTHAp> (last accessed 18/06/2014).

⁷ International Monetary Fund, *Libya beyond the Revolution: Challenges and Opportunities*, 2012 p.2. accessed from <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dp/2012/1201mcd.pdf> (last accessed 18/06/2014)

Failed Nation

In the immediate aftermath of Qaddafi's overthrow, rival militias sought to prove that they were the legitimate revolutionaries. A failure to set aside this winner-loser dichotomy has caused Libya to have become atomised. Indeed, Libya now cannot be thought of as a single country, but as a complex amalgamation of warring tribes and regions. Libya is divided into three distinct regions: Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Cyrenaica. Despite the political activities in Tripolitania, it is the eastern region of Cyrenaica where the majority of friction occurs.

Although Cyrenaica has the majority of Libya's oil wealth, much of the political and economic infrastructure was uprooted and moved to Tripolitania under Qaddafi's regime. Cyrenaica has been described as "one of the most decided frontiers, natural and human, to be found anywhere in the world".⁸ Indeed, the government is becoming increasingly concerned with Cyrenaica's desire for greater autonomy and are reluctant to cede control of the oil fields. This imbalance between east and west has been a point of enduring relevance and was a key reason why the 2011 civil war which broke out in this region.

The UK's historical influence in Cyrenaica should not be downplayed. Britain was largely responsible for overturning the Italian occupation of Libya in 1942 and subsequently controlled Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Unlike Italy and France, Britain willingly relinquished control of Cyrenaica. The success of Operation Ellamy means that Cyrenaica was effectively liberated twice by Britain. These are points which are still remembered today, and give Britain greater sway in the region.

⁸ E.E. Evans Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, (London, 1949).

UK Policy Pathways

It is clear that the NATO model of limited intervention has failed; Libya has no state, no security force, and no economy. This unforeseen failure has resulted in a confused and disjointed policy by the United Kingdom which has intermittently switched between state building and non-intervention. If the UK seeks an effective, coherent policy for the medium term, it must decide upon one of three policy pathways.

1. The UK may opt to follow a path of non-intervention – the ‘do nothing’ approach. This would be in keeping with the original model of limited intervention and would minimise resource outlay. However, it would do little to abate the growing threats to British strategic interests: terrorism, migration and energy security. Furthermore, the political repercussions of allowing a NATO campaign to have failed would be severe.

2. The second pathway is to wait until a strong side emerges amid the chaos. At this stage it will be possible to publically back one side and perhaps offer resources. This would minimise outlay, but is likely to be too late if Libya rapidly descends into civil war.

3. Finally, the UK can decide to pursue a nation-building exercise in Libya. This would be no simple task, requiring greater resources and engagement on thorny issues such as Cyrenaican autonomy. Nevertheless, this would allow Britain to secure her strategic interests and avoid political humiliation.

Pathway Recommendation

Libya’s insurmountable problems can only best solved by following the latter pathway. In reality, any intervention which aims to protect civilians is prone to regime change. In order to rectify this issue, the United Kingdom should do the follow:

1. Continue to train a Libyan security force, but it must change its approach. Instead of training a security force at a national level, the UK must start from the ground level and work upwards. This will require removing the militias from government payroll and incorporating them

into municipal security forces. Most importantly, however, the training must be done in cohesion with UNSMIL's SSR and DDR.

2. Reassess the current 'no boots on the ground' policy. In order to effectively train forces the UK should train Libyans in Libya rather than Bassingbourne. This will require a new UN mandate as UNSCR 1973 explicitly prohibits any NATO presence on the ground. Instead of kinetic operations, the UK should continue to make use of pre-existing US drones.

3. Increase efforts to secure Libyan borders and ungoverned space. There must be a greater presence than 4 British experts for EUBAM if greater border security is to be achieved. The UK must also make efforts to work more closely with bordering states, particularly Algeria.

4. Work more closely with international and regional partners. This will require an increase efforts and resources through working with multinational stakeholders, such as the EU and UN and ensure policies are aligned.

5. Build further capacity within the Libyan government. This should aim to reform the judiciary, electoral system and constitution drafting process. In light of an increasing presence of private consulting firms, the UK must ensure the private sector's goals are aligned with the UN mission.

6. Promote private-sector led, diversified growth into areas such as tourism, hospitality and leisure, construction, telecoms and financial services. These industries should be supported with financial and advisory assistance, particularly for small and medium-sized start-up. In the long-term, this firm foundation will allow British companies to invest further in Libya.

7. Continue to support an inclusive national dialogue for peace alongside Libya's regional partners. The UK's appointment of Jonathon Powell as special envoy to Libya is a positive step in this direction.

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