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“Libya's Terrorist Devolution: Causes and Solutions”

Libya's persistent fragmentation is what is most worrying today. Internal divisions are the product of decades of Gadhafi's reckless governing: he played his citizens off of each other and kept them isolated from the rest of the world, and also deprived them of any political institution that could keep the country united and stable after he was gone. Libyan history shows that Libyans have long been divided, regionally and locally. Tribes have a long history of fighting one another. Today, the Libyan state remains immature, and those ancient divisions have only gotten worse: at the end of Ghadafi's time, in power there were from 100 to 300 armed militia groups; now there are, according to a European study<sup>1</sup> about 1,600 militias, gangs and criminal groups. UN Security Council Resolution 1970 imposed an arms embargo on Libya, but today there are more than 20 million of weapons circulating in a country of only 6 million people.

External powers who have intervened in Libya have actually worsened the polarization and made reconciliation less likely. It is well know that country such Egypt and Emirates have been supporting the Tobruk government and, on the other side, Qatar and Turkey did the same with the GNC in Tripoli. The state of affairs is still going on, even now that thanks to the UNSMIL mediation in Tripoli has been established a government of National

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden), *Report: Militias, Tribes and Islamists*, 19 December 2014.

Accord (GNA), presumably recognized by most of international actors. After the 2011 revolution and international intervention, there were few sustainable political options; social frictions increased in the aftermath of Gadhafi's overthrow, and the country's economic fabric corroded. All this only radicalized the insurgency.

The situation in Libya is so compromised that it can be difficult to provide meaningful policy prescriptions. But I must emphasize that Libya's dramatic downward slide is extremely dangerous for the West, and the West should do everything it can to ensure an improvement of the situation. In a territory stretching like Alaska, are active various shades of Islamic terrorism, from the Muslim Brotherhood to al-Qaeda, from Ansal al-Sharia to ISIS. The absence of any state structure has turned the country into the incubator of terrorism, ready to act as a trigger for the whole continent. The nomadic tradition and the experience gained during the Italian domination - handed down from generation to generation - has provided to the Libyans the ability to survive and recover strength even after the heaviest defeats.

In my opinion there are three key challenges we have to address: the security situation, the severe economic downturn, and deeply fractured politics. These factors are all intertwined, and you cannot tackle one if you have not invested in the other.

First, security. Libya is a country at war today. Criminals and their networks are increasingly well-organized. The state police are powerless even when they exist, and the armed forces no longer exist as a coherent entity (in spite of efforts by some Western countries). The problem of criminals and militias is connected to the huge amount of weapons, so the first thing to do is try to diminish them. One policy could be to consider a "weapons buy-back" program, which has actually been implemented in Afghanistan in recent years, even though in Libya the situation presents many social and economic differences. In the medium term, it is essential that the Libyan Armed Forces, National Security Forces and the local police be fundamentally rebuilt.

Second, the economy. Before the revolution, Libya's oil-based economy was functional and pretty stable. Today, it is in shambles. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) fell from \$74.76 billion in 2010 to \$29.15 billion in 2015, in part because Libya exported 1.6 million barrels of oil per day in 2010 and only exported 240,000 barrels of oil per day in August 2016. Inflation is at almost 30%, youth unemployment is at 48%, and the banking system is on the brink of collapse. In the short term, Libya must manage fiscal spending pressures while restoring and improving basic public services. In the long term, Libya—hopefully with help from the international community—needs to develop a more diversified, market-based economy that goes beyond the oil and gas sector. But in the immediate term, Libya should invest in a new management of oil and gas revenues to ensure they are used in the best interests of the whole country. The private sector will only be able to re-enter the Libyan market once the security situation stabilizes, but then it can help create sustainable jobs and wealth. For the unemployed, targeted interventions should seek advance skills development, vocational training, and apprenticeship and entrepreneurship programs—something that Gadhafi never did, but which Libya needs in order to have a competitive workforce.

Third, Libya's fractured politics. Although there has been some progress in forming a national unity government in Libya, "unity" is today a rather inapplicable word for the country. Friction between various political actors remains high. One approach to consider is helping Libyans build a confederal state, divided into three large regions: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. While a united Libya is preferable, it might not be possible after years of civil war and entrenched hatreds. So I propose something seemingly paradoxical: deconstructing to construct, which may have the best chance of providing Libyans with a deeper stability. Regional governments could better protect local interests in security, economic reconstruction, and governance. The international community should thus help the Libyans start from the bottom, emphasizing local solutions, supporting local actors, and helping to empower Libyans to choose their leaders at a local level. The system does

not exclude the role of the central government in managing and redistributing resources and conducting other important functions such as foreign policy and borders control.

This would mean that such a government would be less influential in the daily life of Libyans. It's an incredibly difficult and long plan, but probably the only one that can work.