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Toward a More Perfect Union: The Struggle for Security in Libya

By William Danvers December 2016

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Introduction and summary

A recent report from the Center for American Progress, "Leveraging U.S. Power in the Middle East," puts in context the foreign policy and national security problems that the United States and all nations face:

> *The geopolitical landscape that emerged after the end of the Cold War is facing recent strains from an unprecedented wave of global migration, climate change, and a more assertive Russia and competitive China—and the Middle East has emerged as a focal point for many of these challenges.*[1]

Libya, as part of the larger Middle East North Africa, or MENA, region, is also a focal point for global challenges and opportunities.

Five years after the fall of Moammar Gadhafi—Libya's longtime despotic leader—the struggle to establish a unified state continues. Today in Libya there is one internationally recognized government—the Government of National Accord, or GNA—and two other competing factions. One is the House of Representatives, or HoR, which is the internationally recognized parliament of Libya and is located in the eastern city of Tobruk. The second faction is the General National Congress, or GNC, which is also headquartered in western Libya in Tripoli.[2] However, if Libya is to successfully rebuild and become a more stable presence in an unstable and volatile region, the Libyan people must support one government. Just as importantly, the issue of security must be addressed.

Security in Libya falls into three separate but interrelated categories. The most pressing challenge is the battle against the Islamic State, or IS—sometimes called ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh. Another is handling the enormous number of independent militias found throughout Libya. The third is cracking down on Libya's criminal underground, which dates back to the time of the Gadhafi government.[3] These three elements of Libya's security dilemma are not independent of each other but rather are intertwined. Defeating IS is crucial but will not be enough to make

Libyans more secure. Militias must be brought under the control of a central government. At the same time, the criminal underground poses a threat to any effort to bring political stability to Libya, both because it involves the militias and because criminal elements help support some of the work of IS.[4]

The most immediate security concern is defeating IS. For Libya, this is an internal issue, but it is also an issue for the United States, Europe, and Libya's neighbors. IS became involved in Libya in October 2014 in the Libyan western coastal town of Derna. IS was pushed out of Derna by local militias that viewed it as a rival and did not like its extreme tactics.[5] IS later moved to Sirte, a town in the Libyan oil crescent. For a time, it controlled as much as 180 miles along the Libyan coast and had as many as 6,000 to 6,500 fighters in Libya.[6] The success of IS began to turn around when Libyan militias loyal to the GNA started to push IS out of Sirte. The GNA asked for and received U.S. military support, and although there is progress, IS continues to have a small footprint in Sirte.[7]

The question is: What will IS do in Libya after it is forced to leave Sirte? It has begun to disperse to the northwest and southwest regions of the country and remains in the northeast in Benghazi.[8] Contingency planning is needed to prevent IS from reconstituting and regaining its previous capabilities elsewhere in Libya beyond Sirte.[9]

Libya's militia problem—which is a primary source of political and economic instability—is more complicated than defeating IS because it is more widespread. Dealing with it is a fundamental part of any effort to build a unified Libyan state. There are said to be as many as 2,000 militias across Libya, and while most are independent, they do fall into three general categories.[10] There are those militias aligned with the GNC, many of which are Islamist but not necessarily jihadi. There are those that are generally anti-Islamist, loyal to the HoR and its military strongman supporter General Khalifa Haftar. Then there are those that are radical jihadis, such as IS and Ansar al-Shariah, which have ties to Al Qaeda.[11] These militias form coalitions when it suits their purpose and at other times are at odds with each other. Regardless, they have helped create a failed Libyan state with no central authority or security structure.[12]

The criminal underground in Libya has been functioning since the time of Gadhafi. There are a number of groups, but there is no real central power structure similar to the mafia. Instead, these criminal groups operate independently, and they traffic in a variety of things, including guns, drugs, and people. They work

with whoever serves their purpose, including IS. The role of the criminal underground has increased as the Libyan economy continues to crumble. In a very real sense, these criminal groups are the connective tissue between the jihadis and the militias, with all three impeding efforts to rebuild Libya.[13]

If Libya devolves into further instability—in effect becoming a failed state—it creates a threat to the region; a threat to Europe because of the increased flow of refugees and migrants from Libya; and a threat to both the United States and European Union because of the presence of IS and Al Qaeda affiliates. While addressing Libya's security crises is an essential piece of the effort to build a functioning state, it will certainly be a difficult and complicated process. Nonetheless, there are things that can be done that will help make Libya more secure.

Defeating IS

- Defeating IS must be the priority for making Libya more secure. The GNA must continue to work with the United States in order to defeat IS.

- The United States must take the lead in support of the GNA's fight against IS, but it must also work with regional partners—including Egypt, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates—as well as with European Union nations, particularly Italy, France, and also with Great Britain.

- Defeating IS means not only eliminating it from Sirte but preventing it from relocating elsewhere in Libya or neighboring states.

Addressing the militia problem

- Libya must develop a more coherent and functional national security structure, but that structure has to accommodate local security concerns and militias without undermining central authority.

- The international community—the United States, the European Union, and MENA nations—must offer law enforcement and military training for Libyan security forces, national and regional, as part of a security restructuring.

- The number of militias must be reduced by eliminating and consolidating existing militias.

- Jobs and education programs must be established that will offer alternatives for people in militias.

Fighting crime and crime networks

- Libya must develop national and regional law enforcement entities that will take on criminal elements throughout the country.

- International organizations such as Interpol, and national law enforcement agencies from the United States and Europe in particular, must help Libyan law enforcement with its effort to fight criminal gangs through training and the sharing of information.

- Libya must build a strong border presence using human and technical means to enforce its borders.

The job of making Libya more secure and stable is ultimately up to the people of Libya. It can only be successful if Libyans realize that they cannot have a functioning state without the central government having more control over the country's security. A more secure Libya is also in the interest of the international community, including the United States, Europe, and Libya's neighbors. This means that all stakeholders must offer the technical and financial support needed to bring security and stability to Libya.

Taking action now to address Libya's immediate threats, while at the same time building its governance and security apparatus, could help avoid the kind of crisis that the international community currently faces in Syria.

Defeating IS

The Islamic State began its involvement in Libya in the city of Derna in 2014.[14] The attempted takeover of Derna was organized by returnees who had been fighting for IS in Syria and Iraq. However, the effort by IS to use Derna as its Libyan base of operation failed. Its draconian ruling style—with its own justice and policing system—alienated the local population, which rose up and forced IS out in June 2015.[15] The lessons of Derna forced IS to change its tactics.

At the same time IS was being pushed out of Derna, it was in the midst of setting up a new base of operation in Sirte.[16] Its inroads into Sirte, which was Gadhafi's hometown, were more successful.[17] In Sirte, IS made an effort to reach out to groups alienated by the civil war against Gadhafi.[18] It also reached out to other jihadi groups in Sirte who saw IS as a viable alternative to the present state of chaos in Libya. At its peak, IS controlled not only Sirte but, by some estimates, as much as 180 miles of Libyan coastline near Sirte.[19] Because of these developments, Libya was on the verge of becoming what terrorism experts have characterized as the third front against IS, the other two fronts being Iraq and Syria.[20]

IS sees Libya as a province of its Syrian and Iraqi caliphate. Foreign fighters in Libya, which at one point were estimated to be as many as 6,000 to 6,500 fighters, generally consist of Libyans who have returned from the fighting in Syria and Iraq; radicals from other Libyan terrorist organizations; and foreign fighters from Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.[21] IS has tried to position itself as the most important and viable of all the Libyan jihadi groups, gaining defectors from groups such as the Libyan Al Qaeda affiliate Ansar al-Sharia. At the same time, Libya was becoming both a place of refuge for IS leaders escaping the war in Syria and Iraq and a base of deployment for Libyan and African operations. Until the recent push against IS in Sirte and due to the relative calm in Libya compared with Syria and Iraq, Libya was seen as a useful alternative place of operation for IS leaders.[22]

IS has a history of aggressive attacks in Libya, particularly against oil facilities. In January of this year, it set fire to an oil tank in Ra's Lanuf.[23] It also set fire to four more oil tanks and targeted an oil pipeline from the Amal oil field to the port of Sidra. At the time, an IS fighter indicated that these attacks were only the beginning, stating, "Today Es Sider (Sidra) port and Rasa Lanuf and tomorrow the port of Brega and after the ports of Tobruk, Es Serir, Jallo, and al-Kufra."[24] IS violence is not limited to oil facilities. This past January, it was responsible for a suicide bombing at a Libyan Coast Guard training camp in Zlitan, killing at least 65 cadets.[25]

The Zlitan attack was a clear indication of a broader IS strategy in Libya.[26] The Libyan Coast Guard plays a role in helping curb the mass exodus of refugees from Libya to Europe. Most of these refugees are not from Libya but elsewhere, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the refugees are victims of Libya's criminal underground, which smuggles them to Libyan ports and from there to Europe. In the case of the Zlitan bombing, there was a common purpose between the criminal gangs and IS. The coast guard interferes with criminal gangs' efforts to use Libya as a port of departure for the refugees they are smuggling. The IS attack on the coast guard served two purposes. It further established IS as a threat in the Libyan oil crescent, and it helped refugee smugglers—part of Libya's criminal element—by crippling the coast guard. This made IS and Libyan organized crime allies of convenience, at least temporarily.

The battle for Sirte

Things changed for IS in May of this year when the Government of National Accord began a campaign referred to as "al-Bunyan al-Marsus," or The Solid Structure, against the jihadi group. It was supported by militias, mostly from Misrata, that have backed the GNA—at least for now—in order to evict IS from Sirte.[27] This past August, the GNA asked for and received support from the U.S. military. This included airstrikes against IS, as well as some special operations troops to provide intelligence and guidance for the airstrikes.[28] The U.S.-GNA cooperation has proven to be largely successful in eliminating IS from Sirte, though the job is not yet complete.

A related concern is what happens to IS once it is pushed out of Sirte. Would it mark the end of large scale IS involvement in Libya, or would IS shift its operations to another part of Libya where it may have better luck establishing itself? There is speculation that IS would move to southwestern Libya in the Fezzan

region, which would give it an operating base for attacks into Tunisia and Algeria.[29] It is unlikely that IS will abandon plans entirely to maintain its presence in Libya. Libya, after all, provides a base of operation for IS in North Africa and the Sahel—a 3,400-mile swath of land that divides the Sahara from the grasslands to the south stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. In addition, Libya would remain a potential base for IS operations in Europe.[30]

The GNA and its militia allies, as well as the United States and its allies, must look beyond Sirte as part of its strategy to defeat IS in Libya. The ability of IS to disrupt the region, as well as to undermine the struggle to form a unified Libyan state, should not be underestimated. While the United States cannot undertake the effort to eliminate IS alone, it needs to lead the international effort to coordinate efforts in the fight against IS. The United States is best equipped both militarily and with respect to the capacity of its intelligence community to take on the responsibility of leading this effort.

Addressing the militias

Libya Dawn and Operation Dignity

After the fall of Gadhafi, there were efforts by the United States, the European Union, and other nations to help Libya deal with its complicated security situation through training and help build a national military and law enforcement structure. This effort was not successful primarily because the temporary Libyan government—established right after the fall of Gadhafi—did not want to rely on foreign security personnel to keep the peace in Libya.[31] This resistance by the Libyan government led to a further dissolution of security, turning Libya into a land run by militias and other nonstate actors. The lack of a national military and security structure has led to chaos and the emergence of vigilante-style justice, most notably by Gen. Khalifa Haftar, a former Gadhafi military officer who organized Operation Dignity and has sided with the House of Representatives.[32] Operation Dignity was Gen. Haftar's effort to stop Islamist groups from controlling the Libyan government. While there are varying opinions of Gen. Haftar and his army—the United States, for one, does not support him—he is an example of the kind of frontier justice that is prevalent in Libya.

The Islamists took control of the General National Congress and formed Libya Dawn, which eventually took over Tripoli and included the Muslim Brotherhood as well as former Al Qaeda members.[33] As the tension between the two sides—the GNC and the HoR—increased, the HoR set up its base of operation in Tobruk. And while the United Nations and much of the international community recognized the HoR as Libya's parliament, this official recognition had little impact as Libya's governing structure collapsed.[34]

Each side—the HoR and the GNC—has the support of a number of militias. In particular, the HoR has Gen. Haftar and his Libyan National Army, or LNA, which is not an official, nationally recognized armed force. Moreover, the LNA has the support of other groups and militias, including Libyan Special Forces, or al-Saiqa. It also has the support of Zintan, al-Sawaiq, and al-Qaqar groups. The

al-Zintan Revolutionaries Military Council was instrumental in the fight against Gadhafi and by some estimates has as many as 4,000 fighters. The LNA operates primarily in eastern Libya, but some of its supporters also have a presence in the western region of the country.[35]

The GNC affiliated Libya Dawn is made up of pro-Islamist militias that took over the Tripoli airport, as well as other parts of Tripoli, in 2014, precipitating the split in the Libyan government.[36] Many of Libya Dawn's fighters come from Misrata, located on the Libyan coast about 116 miles east of Tripoli. The fighters from Misrata align themselves with the Muslim Brotherhood and are competitors of the Zintan brigades. In addition to Libya Dawn, the GNC receives support from other militias such as Battalion 166, a pro-Haftar group.[37] Most of these militias now nominally support the GNA.

The Petroleum Facilities Guard

Although it maintains its independence and is fragmented, the Petroleum Facilities Guard, or PFG—which has recently been loosely aligned with the GNA—has controlled the oil and gas infrastructure in eastern Libya. The PFG, which by some estimates has 35,000 fighters, has come under attack by Gen. Haftar's forces, who have taken control of the ports of Ra's Lanuf, Es Sidra, and Zueitina.[38] This strengthens Gen. Haftar's position and puts him at further odds with the GNA.[39]

Jihadi groups and other extremists

The two key jihadi groups are the Islamic State and Ansar al-Sharia—which is linked to Al Qaeda—and each opposes the other. While made up primarily of foreign fighters, IS has recruited some disaffected Libyan jihadis as well. As for Ansar al-Sharia, it operates largely in the east and has had a presence in Benghazi since the downfall of Gadhafi in 2011.[40] Ansar al-Sharia was accused of leading the attack that killed U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens in 2012.[41] Its goals are to keep control of Derna and take control of Benghazi, as well as to oppose IS. While there are other groups that could be put in the jihadi category as well, these are the two main jihadi actors.[42] The opposition between IS and Ansar al-Sharia reflects the divide between IS and Al Qaeda globally, a different approach to jihad.

There are other extremist groups operating in southwestern Libya that are using their territory as a base of operations for attacks in countries such as Algeria and Niger. One of these groups, Al-Murabitoun, has been characterized by the U.S. Department of State as threat to the Sahel. Its leader, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who may have been killed in a U.S. airstrike, led the 2013 attack against an Algerian gas facility in which three Americans were killed.[43] Clearly, the Sahel is fertile ground for a possible move by IS from Sirte.[44]

Because of the fractious nature of Libyan politics, the nation does not had unified security forces. The HoR refuses to recognize the Government of National Accord as the legitimate government of Libya. The recent move by Gen. Haftar to take over Libyan ports, combined with the HoR declaring him a field marshal, only serves to deepen the divide.[45]

Nonetheless, the GNA is taking some positive steps to gain some control over the security situation in Libya. In May, the GNA announced that it was creating a Presidential Guard that would protect Libya's government buildings and borders, as well as protect high-ranking visitors to Libya.[46]

In addition, there have been discussions between the GNA and the HoR about forming a new body to head up the Libyan army. The idea would be to bring together GNA and HoR officials in a way that would include Gen. Haftar, who will have to be taken into consideration as part of any internal Libyan security arrangement.[47] His recent takeover of Libyan ports, his promotion to field marshal, and the HoR rejection of the GNA—at least the Cabinet makeup—underscores the need to do more to accommodate Gen. Haftar and the HoR. What he wants specifically in exchange for his support of the GNA is unclear. It is clear, however, that he wants to play an important military role. In negotiating with Gen. Haftar, the GNA must be careful not to alienate the GNC.[48]

While the internecine battle between the HoR and the GNA, as well as the GNC—which, for the moment, is staying out of this fight—is an important part of the Libyan militia issue, it is not the only concern or consideration. Since the collapse of the central government, militias and regional governments have become more autonomous. No matter what kind of arrangement is made, individual militias and local governments will have to be taken into consideration when forming a national security consensus.[49]

This is a two-sided dilemma. On one hand, a weak central government has given more power to regional and local authorities.[50] At the same time, the lack of authority of the central government has made the militias more resistant to integration into a national security structure.[51] Integration is essential in order for Libya to deal with its security issues. Looking for a creative solution that would focus on eliminating the number of militias while giving the remaining ones some autonomy and connecting them to a functioning central government must be part of any future security equation.

Fighting crime and crime networks

The criminal underground

In addition to the Islamic State and the militias, Libya's criminal underground is a problem for the United States, the European Union, and nations from the Middle East North Africa region. The smuggling of refugees and the trafficking of drugs and weapons create problems for Libya and in the region. Libya's criminal groups have a long history in the nation. As Gadhafi once asked and answered, "What are black markets? They are people's markets."[52] A United States Institute of Peace, or USIP, study looking at Libya's criminal element found that even as Libya struggles to build a democracy, "trafficking is considered a normal way of transferring resources."[53] The study also concludes that, "State institutions still lack both authority and structure, and local leaders maintain considerable power over their regions outside of the central government." [54] The transportation of smuggled goods is done with the cooperation of local communities, particularly those along the border. This activity in Libya is another threat, in addition to IS, to Libya's immediate neighbors.[55]

Human trafficking

The criminal activity that has gotten the most attention, particularly from the European Union, is human trafficking. In this case, trafficking means smuggling refugees to Libya, where they board boats that are sent to Europe—most often to Italy. More migrants from Africa go through Libya than any other country. The International Organization for Migration estimates that since the beginning of 2015, more than 180,000 migrants have embarked from Libya to Europe. The number of migrants from Syria and Iraq using Libya as a jumping-off point for Europe has increased in recent years. Nonetheless, a larger number of migrants are coming from Eritrea, Nigeria, Gambia, Somalia, Sudan, and even Bangladesh.[56] They come because of poverty, war, and fear of persecution, and they are guided by smugglers,

who for a fee get them to Libya and on a boat to Europe.[57] This process does not begin at Libyan ports; there are networks across Africa that facilitate the process, and it is a lucrative business.[58] This is a crisis for the European Union, whose resources are stretched thin because of migrants from Libya, Syria, and South Asia.

Trafficking of people is an organized effort that involves Libyans, particularly in less densely populated regions of the country, serving as guides through desolate terrain.[59] There is a connection between the smuggling of people and the smuggling of other illicit goods, particularly drugs. The trafficking networks are linked to the criminal networks of those trafficking these goods, making the economics of this activity more complicated.[60]

Drugs, protection, and arms trade

Cocaine, heroin, hashish, and prescription drugs are all mainstays of drug smuggling everywhere, and Libya is no different. The illicit trade in drugs represents big business, involving great amounts of money. Hashish, for example, provides a lucrative source of revenue for Libyan smugglers. Over a 32-month period, beginning in April 2013, 20 ships connected to Libya that contained hashish valued at approximately $3.2 billion were intercepted by Italian officials.[61] There is speculation that IS may have been imposing a tax on the passage of these drugs, primarily to Europe, and that there may have been an exchange of drugs for arms as well.[62]

The protection racket is tied to the overall illicit economy, from the smuggling of people to the smuggling of drugs and weapons. There are various kinds of protection being offered directly and indirectly to traffickers by regional militias and armed groups. It may be something as simple as offering the right of passage. It may be offering direct protection within a specific place, or it could involve protection through a particular area. For example, Tuareg groups offer protection for traffickers as they transit along the border of Niger.[63] As previously noted, the protection racket is connected to the other major illicit market in Libya, the trade in arms.

The proliferation of weapons in Libya, despite an international arms embargo, has made its criminal underground an exporter and now, it would seem, an illicit importer as well.[64] The United States is on record as supporting a Government of National Accord exemption to the Libyan arms embargo while still maintaining the overall embargo.[65] Since controlling the illicit flow of arms remains an issue, an argument could be made that helping the GNA arm itself through legal means could help support this goal.

Recommendations

Defeating IS

Defeating the Islamic State must be the No. 1 priority in efforts to make Libya more secure. The Government of National Accord must continue to work with the United States to defeat IS. The GNA must continue to renew requests to have the United States help defeat IS in Sirte until that mission is complete. While defeating IS in Sirte does not mean that it will be eliminated from Libya, uprooting it from Sirte will undercut both its ability to operate in a key geographical location in Libya and its image as a growing and successful jihadi threat.

The United States must take the lead in supporting the GNA's fight against IS, but it must also work with regional partners, including Egypt and Tunisia, as well as with European nations. There has to be an effort to coordinate international involvement in the fight against IS, and the United States must take the lead in coordinating this effort. In particular, the United States Africa Command, or AFRICOM, which has been doing a good job at addressing some of the security challenges in Libya, should organize regional and NATO allies that are involved in the fight against IS. This includes NATO nations such as Italy, France, and Great Britain. It also includes allies from the Middle East North Africa region such as Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Eliminate IS in Sirte but also prevent it from relocating elsewhere in Libya. Getting IS out of Sirte will not be the end of IS in Libya. IS will likely move to Libya's southwest region, where it will continue to pose a challenge to Tunisia and other North African nations, as well as the Sahel.[66] There is also a potential threat of IS moving into the Sinai in Egypt. AFRICOM must also take the lead here in developing a strategy with U.S. allies to prevent IS from regrouping elsewhere in Libya. This should involve the United States and allied intelligence resources as well.

Addressing the militia problem

Build a coherent and functional national security structure in Libya that accommodates local security concerns and militias without undermining a national government. This national security structure should include an armed force loyal to the central government, the police, and the border patrol. While regional authorities—including militias—must support this structure, the regions must retain a certain degree of autonomy and authority. Gen. Haftar's Libyan National Army could play a critical role in a national security force, but it must work under the GNA or its democratically elected successor government.

The international community must offer law enforcement and military training for Libyan security forces on a national and regional level as part of a security restructuring. The effort to balance the interests of regional and local militias can be done more easily if the international community—the United States, the European Union, and MENA nations—works with the GNA in the training of the army and law enforcement forces. The United States can take the lead in organizing the effort, but the European Union are well placed both in terms of geography and ability to play the biggest role in training. This training can take place in Libya or outside Libya, wherever makes the most sense. The key is to set up programs that will not only offer technical training but will also help instill a sense of loyalty to the central government.

Reduce the number of militias by eliminating and consolidating existing militias. There must be an effort to integrate militias into a national network of security forces that are connected to the central government. One possibility would be to create national guard units that answer to both regional and central governments. This would allow militias to maintain some autonomy but also make them part of Libyan regular security forces.

Jobs and education programs must be established that will offer alternatives for those in militias. As part of the effort to eliminate some of the militias, education and jobs programs must be created that will offer an alternative to those who depend on the militias to support themselves. While Libya has attempted its own disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate, or DDR, program, it would do well to study Colombia's DDR program as a successful example of how to reintegrate militia members into society.[67] While the situation in Colombia is not the same as that in Libya, there are lessons that can be drawn from the successes and limitations of the Colombian program. Having the Colombians work directly with the Libyans on developing their own DDR effort is worth considering.

Fighting crime and crime networks

Developing national and regional law enforcement entities to take on criminal elements is essential to push back against Libya's criminal underground. While there must be a national law enforcement structure that is a function of the central government, local militias should be incentivized to become part of a national anti-crime undertaking. Funding and training provided by the central government will help convince local militias to participate.

International organizations such as Interpol and U.S. and EU national law enforcement agencies must help Libyan law enforcement fight criminal gangs through training and information sharing. Training is essential to ensure that there is coherence to the development of Libyan law enforcement capacity. There is not a strong tradition in Libya of a neutral law enforcement infrastructure. This is both a problem, since there is no real precedent, and an opportunity, since training programs do not necessarily have to correct issues of existing law enforcement institutions.

Libya must build a strong border presence by working with the United States, the European Union, and MENA nations and using human and technical means to enforce its borders. Border enforcement is a necessary element of the effort to combat crime in Libya and to prevent criminal networks from acting with impunity across borders, as well as of coastal enforcement efforts. This will necessarily involve working with local militias and governing entities. It will also involve training, particularly with the development of a national border patrol and enforcement agency.

Conclusion

There are two essential components that must be present in the rebuilding of Libya. The first is effective governance administered by a central government that coordinates with governments from the Middle East North Africa region. The second—which is detailed in this report—is addressing Libya's security problems.

Libyan security today is essentially a function of independent militias that have their own governing structures and their own loyalties and ambitions. At the moment, Libyan militias are working with the Government of National Accord to defeat the Islamic State in Sirte. And while defeating IS in Sirte is central to making Libya more secure—and while it cannot be done without the help of the United States and its allies—doing so will not be the end of its involvement in Libya. There must be a coordinated effort, led by the United States Africa Command, to prevent IS from taking root elsewhere in Libya once it is defeated in Sirte.

Even if the GNA, working with the international community, is able to defeat IS, this will only be part of what is necessary to make Libya more secure. There must also be a focused effort by the GNA, again supported by the United States and the international community, to deal with Libya's militia problem, which must include the reduction and consolidation of militias.

Finally, Libya's criminal underground cannot be permitted to proliferate and operate with impunity. There must be a stepped-up effort to develop a law enforcement infrastructure—national and local—that will deal with the burgeoning rackets of trafficking people, drugs, and arms.

While there may be little appetite on the part of the United States to take the lead with the overall effort to assist Libya, helping the country rebuild is possible if the United States leverages its power and marshals the support from Libya's neighbors and the European Union. There is a path forward in Libya, but time is rapidly running out.

About the author

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