Few people expected to see the revolution sweeping the Arab World pass by Libya. Colonel Qadhafi had ruled the country with an iron fist for more than four decades and was thought to be secure in his position. Yet as events proved, the Libyan revolution emerged as the most violent of the Arab Spring as well as the most profound. Indeed of all the current upheavals in the area, the Libyan awakening is the most interesting. Much of discontent in Tunisia and Egypt was against Hosni Mubarak and Zein El Abedien ben Ali’s kleptocracies that have plagued both countries. Yet, removing these dictators appears to have changed little in those. The bureaucratic institutions are still intact along with other political and social institutions and unless the real causes of Egypt and Tunisia’s pains are relieved, removing heads of state will change little. Libya on the other hand has disposed of a whole system with its leaders and ephemeral institutions, and has decided to begin fresh. This approach to change has its positives and negatives. On the positive side, the revolution has provided Libyans with the opportunity to create a modern, secular, transparent, democratic system. However to achieve that, Libyans have to overcome huge social, religious, and psychological obstacles that would undoubtedly make that task extremely difficult to achieve.

Some commentators regularly and erroneously compare Libya to Iraq and Afghanistan and although all three share some characteristics, they are very different in make-up and orientation. Libya is a Muslim State but it is far from being an Islamist one. And, while the country has tribes, it is not a tribal society. The absolute majority of Libya is urban and urban centers are not divided along tribal lines. Also, Libya does not have the ethnic and religious divisions the other two have. Indeed, only three percent of Libya is Berber or as they like to be called, Amazig, and the remaining 97 per cent of the population is Arab, descending from the Bani Sulaim tribe that left Arabia during the twelfth century. There are no Sunni-Shiite divisions; all Libyans are Sunnis from the Maliki sect of Islam, which is very different from the Islam practiced in the Arab East.

Abstract

Libya’s road to democracy is paved with obstacles. This wannabe-democracy has to deal not only with the lack of political institutions, state security organizations and police forces but also with the potential emergence of Islamic fundamentalists out of the chaos. However, there are many signals that permit us to be optimistic about Libya’s future. In particular, a key role in Libya’s democratization will be played by USA and Europe, at the expenses of the other African countries, China and Russia. Actually, the paper argues that the future of Libya depends on these countries’ economic and security assistance.

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(*) The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI.
Yet having said that the facts remain that Libyan society is socially conservative and largely religious. Indeed, Libya has had more religious leaders than secular ones. And while it is not a tribal society it has approximately 150 tribes. Of these, the largest are Warfalla and the Magarha in the west of the country and Abeidat and Awagir in the East. Warfalla, a bastion for Qadhafi supporters is more of a district than a tribe and is composed of a collection of smaller tribes that are linked to Warfalla through marriage. Mahmoud Jibril, the former head of the transitional government is a Warfali. The Qathathfa (Qadhafi’s tribe) links itself through marriage blood to Warfalla. The other large tribe in the west of the country is the Magarha tribe. The Magarha, whose members are also found in the southern part of Western Libya, is the tribe of Abdallah Al-Sanusi, Qadhafi’s brother-in-law and former head of security.

In the east of the country the Abeidat is thought to be the largest. It is the tribe of General Abdel Fatah Younis, the late insurgents military chief. Interestingly, Younis was allegedly assassinated by fundamentalists in revenge for acts he ordered on them while he was still in the service of Qadhafi. The Awagir are the second in size and the current head of the National Transitional Council (NTC), Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, belongs to it. There were never exact figures on the membership in these tribes. Over the last four decades Qadhafi marginalized all the tribes except Warfalla, his own, and the Magarha. Some members of these continue to oppose the February 2011 revolution, but they are not many.

Qadhafi was not particular about the tribal origins of those he enriched or used to commit atrocities in and outside Libya. However, he was particular about who he assigned to the defense of his regime. For that he did not use the Warfalla or the Magarha tribes or even all of the Qathathfa but concentrated on the Khoose, a segment of the Qathathfa tribe from which he originates and has direct blood ties. The Khoose were nomads of the Sirtica for whom he developed the village of Sirte into a multi-billion dollar city and planned for it to be the capital of his new African empire. The Khoose are few and hence they headed all the unofficial security organs in the state and were entrusted with overseeing the official security organs open to all Qadhafi loyalists irrespective from which tribe they hailed. Hence, tribalism in the Qadhafi state was used as a tool to consolidate his position and not as an instrument of rule. He, and only he, ruled.

Yet, Qadhafi’s regime always thrived on chaos, because in chaos lies opportunity and the intrinsic divisive nature of tribalism which is fraught with opportunity waiting to be unleashed. The NTC was in an excellent position to prevent tribalism from reconstitute itself in the Libyan psyche, but it made the mistake of allowing Mr. Qadhafi to set a tribal agenda for it. Instead of rejecting the tyrant’s transparent attempt to use tribalism as a policy tool, the inexperienced government convened a counter tribal meeting in the Emirates. With the tribal revivalism in full swing Warfalla decided to hold its own gathering in Turkey, and that was soon followed by other tribal conventions throughout the country. Little did they realize that in such revolutions, the decisions they take set the trend for the future.

Perhaps the solution to this issue can first be structurally achieved with the return to the federal system that existed prior to 1963. Then, only three federal states emerged, but today there is a need for perhaps two or three more to accommodate urban divisions in the west of the country. Cyrenaica, the eastern province is quite united and has already developed a strong identity through undergoing tragic stages in its modern history, first under Fascist rule that decimated more than half of its population in three concentration camps and then 40 years of Qadhafi’s dictatorship which has relegated it to a Fourth World society. With a large number of tribes, Cyrenaica has demonstrated that tribal identity can be relinquished for a larger unit. Hence the problem is not so much with Cyrenaica but with the other parts of Libya that have not experienced similar unifying forces.

**Economic Milieu**

However, tribal issues pale in comparison to other immediate social problems confronting Libyan society; graft, dilapidated infrastructure, illegal gains, and a rentier economy that simply does not function. Forty years of neglect have left the country in desperate economic straights. Unemployment
was hovering at 40 per cent and now more. Those who were employed did not have the necessary intellectual or administrative tools to be of any real use to the Libyan economy. Libyans are functionally illiterate because Mr. Qadhafi’s educational system provided them with little knowledge or skills. This intellectual vacuum was filled by the importation of over three million foreign expatriates in a country, with more than half of its population either unemployed or under-employed.

Even the oil industry, the mainstay of the economy is facing huge problems and cannot function without external support. The pipelines are old and need constant maintenance along with the refineries and well structures. More important is the lack of exploration and discovery of new oil wells. The latest concession the previous regime signed was with British Petroleum (BP) in Libya’s territorial waters. During the Qadhafi era, Libyan oil output hovered around 1.3 million barrels a day and never achieved the 2.4 million high before his Putsch. Finally, the stark reality is that oil has enabled Libya to produce little and import much. Most serious is it imports over 85 per cent of its food and 40 years of Qadhafi control has done little to ameliorate this need. And, unless the new government plans and implements policies to deal with this issue before oil runs out, the United Nations can add Libya to the Horn of Africa as areas experiencing extreme famine.

Yet, in spite of all these negatives, oil revenue will provide the country with a potential to overcome some of these problems in the immediate future. Libya’s accessible overseas assets are estimated to be over $100 billion and its oil production has resumed in the first weeks of the 2011 fourth quarter. After the liberation of Cyrenaica and its oil installations in 2011, French, Italian, and American oil companies operating in the country predicted a 1.6 million b/d output would be achieved within nine months of the resumption of operations. That figure was reached in mid April of 2012. Libya’s current output target is the 1969 output of 2.4 million b/d within four years. However this seems to be highly unlikely without massive external support, maintenance, and further development of the country’s energy infrastructure.

What is certain is that during the next three years Libya will witness a huge influx of companies from countries that helped Libya rid itself of its tyrant. Heading that list are France and Britain with Italy and Turkey running second. At stake are billions of dollars in reconstruction contracts these countries need in a depressed global economic environment. Libya needs everything, from needles to Jumbo Jets. The spokesperson for the European Parliament justified Europe’s involvement in Libya on the ground that Libya is a European neighbor in distress. Libya is proving to be an extension of Europe rather than just a neighbor. There is more in common between Greece, Spain, Italy and Libya than there is between the first three and Sweden, Norway or Germany. Libya is the future source of Europe’s energy and the gateway to the African market. Today it is oil, but in the near future solar energy. Under a new democratic forward looking system, Libya will serve as the new tourist destination of overcrowded Europe and there is a strong possibility that the sparsely populated country will serve a home for many Europeans fed up with the expense of European living. Indeed, in both the short and long runs, Libya has far more to offer Europe than Dubai or the Gulf region.

NATO’s economic and social wing is actively involved in helping Libya’s develop a new administration to run the country. More recently the United Nations has also sent experts to support NATO in that mission but it will require a long time for the existing Libyan bureaucracy to unlearn what it has learned under 42 years of Qadhafi’s dictatorship and replace that with useful modern administration techniques needed in the 21st century.

Security Milieu

Mr. Qadhafi disbanded the military in favor of security forces made up of individuals with blood ties and imported African immigrants to whom he gave citizenship, property and position in return for loyalty and support. Those were put under the leadership of his sons and immediate family members. Additionally there were three internal security agencies headed by individuals with blood ties to Qadhafi and two external security organs headed by revolutionary committee members, one of
which was Musa Kawsa who defected at the beginning of the revolution. Qadhafi’s brother-in-law Abdallah Al-Sanusi oversaw all these.

The immediate security problems facing the council and country are threefold. First the segment of Libya’s population that owes its very existence to the former dictator. This group owes its wealth and privileges to the generosity of the former Libyan regime. Mr. Qadhafi provided this group with assets he confiscated from Libyans or urged this group to help itself to the wealth of other Libyans under his policy of “the house belongs to its inhabitant.” With Qadhafi gone, the rightful property owners are reclaiming their property. The thousands who have freely benefited from that property over the years will certainly have little love for any new government depriving them of its continues use. Indeed even liberated Tripoli is witnessing a sizeable segment of its population yearning for the privileged Qadhafi days. More serious is the potential for this segment to serve as a Qadhafi fifth column if this war continues or a nucleus for a neo-Qadhafi political party in a new democratic Libya.

The second security issue deals with Libya’s neighbors where Qadhafi’s influence continues to be strong. The Libyan tyrant lavishly spent Libya’s wealth on promoting himself in Africa. Africa is fraught with dictators who owe their longevity to Mr. Qadhafi. He provided them with funds and foreign investment in return for their willingness to accept him as Africa’s “King of Kings”. More serious are the Touaregs and other Sahelian Africans who constituted the largest segment of Qadhafi’s mercenaries. Thousand of these have returned to their homes in Mali, Niger and Chad with their weapons. These, along with thousands more Africans who had worked in Libya but are now returning to their home countries serve as an important pool of a potential mercenaries ready to wreak havoc in Libya to revive a neo-Qadhafi system.

It will take many years for Libya to reconstitute, develop, and train a professional defense force capable of securing its southern borders with Chad and Niger and western border with Algeria, three countries that proved to be ardent supporters of Qadhafi. Until then, Libya will need Western electronic equipment and support to patrol and secure huge and porous borders. Italy in particular can play an extremely positive role in this respect. African illegal immigration to Italy through Libya is far too large to be handled alone by the current government headed by Abdul Rahim Al-Keeb, which has proven itself to be rather weak and ineffective in dealing with security. Who ever comes to govern after the planned June 2012 elections will need much support from Europe, the primary target of that illegal immigration. For a variety of reasons primarily their support for Qadhafi, currently Africans are not welcome in Libya and many Libyans favor closing the southern borders with Africa altogether and removing Africans currently in Libya back to their countries of origin.

Another security issue is the proliferation of weapons in the country. Fighters are unwilling to immediately give up their weapons because of the fear that the regime would revert to what it was under Qadhafi but more important because the power that has given them. The TNC has offered all the fighters the opportunity to keep their arms but join either the police force or the new military forces. Many have accepted the offer and are training to serve in that new capacity, but others do not want to join either service and are holding out for payments or some other deal. The security situation is improving rapidly but there continues to be a security vacuum that has not been filled by the infant national security forces. Demonstrations in Benghazi and Tripoli against militias are proliferating and some militias are disbanding but until the TNC is itself disbanded and free elections are held, many are not willing to give up their arms.

Conclusion

The revolution in Libya is over and currently the country finds itself in an unenviable position not experienced since the end of the Second World War. It seeks to metamorphosis into a democratic developed state but the obstacles in reaching that goal are great given that it is devoid of political institutions, a viable economy, state security organizations, and a police force. For the first time in
its modern history, Libya has a scared, angry, and armed population confronting a difficult and an uncertain future.

A worrying trend in the conflict is the potential emergence of Islamic fundamentalist out of this chaos. Libya is Muslim but not Islamist and while many are religious, few want to see a theocracy or a religious system in a secular garb. Indeed, the constitutional draft the TNC initiated envisages a Democratic, semi-Secular state, transparent and unlike anything in the region including Saudi Arabia or Iran. Moreover, after four decades of dictatorship and a bloody struggle, few in Libya are likely to opt for a religious dictatorship to replace the secular dictatorship they had just overthrown. Libya's support came from Western Society. The United States and France were instrumental for saving tens of thousands of Libyans lives in eastern Libya.

Europe and the United States, have established a very powerful foothold in Libya and as a result the potential for strengthening ties with a new Libya is high. Libyans on more than one occasion have demonstrated their willingness to enter into economic and security agreements with individual NATO countries that have assisted it in removing Qadhafi. It has also not turned down NATO military and training support. NATO’s involvement in Libya has opened huge economic opportunity for American and European firms willing to assist it in rebuilding a neglected and destroyed infrastructure and an infant security apparatus. The majority of Libyans are serious about establishing one of the first Arab democratic states and it can be achieved at little cost to Europe. NATO put Libya on the road to democracy without the need for two hundred thousand soldiers it took to invade Iraq. Indeed all this took place without Western boots on the ground. The operation will ultimately cost Western society nothing, given that Libya has agreed to pay for the cost of all the operation. The biggest losers have been African countries, Russia, and China. Libyans have become leery of Africans. Africa has been a bottomless hole that has consumed huge amounts of Libya’s wealth with little return and its support for Qadhafi has not sat well with Libyans. To make matters worse African mercenaries rushed to join the ranks of Qadhafi’s forces and killed and tortured many Libyan civilians. Deep hatred has emerged for Africans and it’s highly unlikely that in the near future Libya will look south, east or west. The same fate has followed Russia and China. Both did not veto the United Nations resolution authorizing NATO action in Libya but they stood by the Qadhafi’s regime until the end.

In conclusion, it is difficult to ascertain what Libya will be like in five years time given the country is still in the process of developing its new constitutional framework and structures but based on two recent local election held in the city of Misrata and Benghazi the future looks bright. The elections offered the citizens of those cities an opportunity to vote in free elections for the first time in their modern history and both cities went through the process well and elected their representatives in a civilized orderly fashion that surprised even them. Development is not easy and Libya is for the first time in its history trying to grapple with its underdevelopment. It is doing this without the necessary tools available to other developing countries. How successful it will be will depend on how much assistance and good will it offered to it by those who would benefit most by its democratic transformation.