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Middle East and North Africa Programme Roundtable Summary

Libya's Future

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Introduction

The current situation in Libya is dynamic and fraught with complexities. Libya, in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, has now become a volatile state with Colonel Gaddafi fiercely resisting attacks by the opposition based in Benghazi and international calls to step down.

This paper is a brief summary of a roundtable discussion held at Chatham House on 23 March 2011, which brought together experts on the region from a variety of sectors to discuss Libya's future. A consensus emerged from the discussion that Gaddafi does not have a long-term future in Libya; however, the protracted nature of his departure leaves many questions as to the likely outcomes of the current conflict and the future political landscape of Libya.

A number of key points arose from the discussion:

- Conferring the Interim Council with *de facto* governing status during this period would be beneficial for the future transition to a more inclusive political system.
- The UN-mandated coalition must prepare for a number of different outcomes from the current situation – including an ongoing military stalemate or a prolonged 'failed state' phase with Gaddafi still claiming the leadership.
- Keeping diplomatic lines open for Gaddafi to turn to might help prevent such a 'failed state' phase.
- Current and future sanctions must be tailored to insulate Libyans from further damage to their livelihoods and living conditions.

The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule.

The Chatham House Rule

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Military campaigns

The first session explored the direct strike action taken by the UN-mandated coalition and the feasibility of Gaddafi's position. Although many felt that there is no long-term future for Gaddafi as permanent leader of Libya, it was not assumed that his downfall would come at the hands of the kind of opposition movements Libya has seen so far. Gaddafi's exit is likely to be dependent on the opposition's ability to harness its initial success and initiate a new wave of coordinated uprisings on the ground, culminating in an uprising in Tripoli. Although action taken by the coalition so far in Libya has generally been seen as effective and creditable, there are no clear and assured options for how it might assist the opposition directly in the fight against Gaddafi.

It was agreed that in spite of the sanctions against the Libyan government Gaddafi himself is in a strong financial position, and it is not expected that he will run out of funds in the short to medium term. This means that blandishments and incentives are unlikely to lead to Gaddafi's exit.

It was noted that the Interim Council, set up by the opposition in the first wave of uprisings, seems to be slowly overcoming its initial disorganization in Benghazi and is attempting to establish government functions. With a view to the future and the relief and reconstruction effort, it would be beneficial to confer some status on the Council as a *de facto* government, possibly through a new UN Security Council resolution.

The aftermath

Exploring the possible scenarios and roles for different international actors in the aftermath of the conflict, it was apparent that the situation could develop in several directions and the coalition and international community need to be prepared for different scenarios to unfold.

It is possible, given Gaddafi's demonstrated tenacity, that a prolonged military stalemate could develop or even that a 'failed state' phase could ensue with Gaddafi continuing to claim leadership. Both scenarios would have disastrous humanitarian consequences for Libya. They would also be a highly damaging turn for the coalition and call into question the concept of UN-sanctioned humanitarian intervention. It is essential for the coalition to consider options in advance of either of these scenarios arising.

It is necessary to ensure some diplomatic lines are left open to Gaddafi, should he choose to use them. The coalition is not in a position to play a

direct diplomatic role, but diplomacy could be pursued through a combination of the United Nations and the African Union, or with the aid of a neutral state such as South Africa.

Reconstruction and the economy

The final discussion looked at the potential humanitarian, economic and reconstruction challenges ahead and more specifically at the longer-term impact of responses to the current situation.

It was argued that the use of sanctions should be considered carefully in terms of its impact on the current conflict and the aftermath. The international community should do its utmost to insulate the Libyan people from the effects of sanctions; they will waver in their support for the opposition if there is lasting and prolonged damage to their living conditions and livelihoods. Sanctions should, therefore, be adjusted to accommodate the population even if this would seemingly ease the pressure on the regime. Discerning sanctions are already in place with the relaxation of strictures on Italian energy company Eni, which allow it to continue to provide gas to households in the west of Libya, thereby easing the humanitarian impact.

In the event of Gaddafi's departure the UN should be ready to lead with potential structures and options for the political transition of Libya to a more inclusive form of government. It should, however, proceed cautiously and not impose a unifying vision or system on a burgeoning independent state. The UN should be there to facilitate the development of a homegrown political infrastructure. A more formal recognition of the Interim Council would be an initial step in reinforcing the Libyan efforts towards transition.