LIBYA: THINKING AHEAD TO THE TRANSITION

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MR.: You are listening to a podcast from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

MARINA OTTAWAY: First of all, let me introduce myself. I’m Marina Ottaway and I am happy to announce I’m a senior associate in the Middle East program. I’m no longer the director of the Middle East program, which makes me extremely happy. (Laughter.)

MR.: Never liked bureaucracy anyway, did you?

MS. OTTAWAY: No. (Chuckles.) OK, we are very happy to be able to host this meeting here today. It’s – we all know that the transition in Libya has now taken place, yet that there are still a lot of uncertainties about when the – when Gadhafi will leave, when the present government is finally going to collapse. There are negotiations, but there is a war going on. There are negotiations on the side and I think – I’m certainly not going to – to try to predict how much longer the situation is going to last.

What is clear is that it’s not too early to start thinking about how the transition is going to unfold once Gadhafi goes. One think that we are learning from what we are – what we are seeing in other Arab countries undergoing the transition and particularly in Egypt and Tunisia where in fact the old regime has fallen is how complicated these transitions are, how many – and how difficult, I think, it’s going to be for all countries to find a balance between two, I would say, competing and contradictory imperatives.

And one of these imperatives is that of moving fast, to put an end fast to the uncertainty of the situation in which you have ad hoc arrangements, you don’t have a government that has clear authority. This is something which is plaguing now – certainly plaguing Egypt. So there is a need for speed in setting up a government that has some legitimacy, that has been formed, you know, that can be considered to be accountable in some sense.

But there is also a great need for not moving too fast because if a country moves too fast then there is really no agreement about what the new government is and the new system – the new system is being created. So they’re really delicate issues, these transitions, and I think it’s going to be even more complicated in the case of Libya for a number – for a number of reasons.

First of all, what we have now is the reality – well, let me start actually with we have the reality of a country that has been devastated by decades of misrule, a country that has not been able to use its oil wells to really get anywhere essentially. Secondly, we have a situation in which the company now is politically divided in two parts. There is a transitional national council in the east.

And certainly there will have to be tremendous changes in order for a transitional mechanism to be put in place that can control the entire country rather than being simply seen as something which is imposed by one part of the country on the other. Another big problem in Libya is the fact that the institutions, if one can call them institutions,
have been at best abusing democratic force over the several decades. The system created by Gadhafi – I mean, yes, it is an authoritarian system. That we know. But it’s a system unlike any other so that essentially a lot of the normal political – even administrative institutions that you find in countries are not functioning – are not functioning well.

And finally, there is the issue of the fact that the security forces of course are now deeply divided. There are fighters – many of them came from the Libyan military – who are fighting on both sides of the aisle.

So the country is going to face considerable problems, considerable challenges. And I think it’s very important and it’s very good to know that there are people that have been thinking – that have been thinking for months about this, that have really started early on the process of trying to figure out what is the next step.

With that introduction, let me introduce the two speakers, first – who are both Libyan-Americans who are deeply involved in this process of trying to figure out what the next steps are supposed to be, where the – you know, how to manage this process of transition.

First of all, to my extreme left is Esam Omiesh, who is the director of the Libyan Emergency Task Force. This is an organization created by group of Libyan-Americans who started from the very beginning of the uprising in Libya to in fact concentrate on this issue, try to think about this issue, about how the transition, how a post-Gadhafi transition should take place. So he is in a perfect position to tell us about what are some of the ideas that are being discussed.

I will add one more thing about Mr. Omiesh. He’s highly unusual among the speakers we have here that he’s also a medical doctor. We have a lot of political scientists usually and politicians but it’s very rare that we have a medical doctor.

To my left is Fadel Lamen. He is the president of the Washington-based American-Libyan Council, again an association of Libyan-Americans who have been trying to promote strengthening the U.S.-Libyan relation for a long time and now are also focusing on the issue – you know, on the present crisis and the issue of the transition.

Without further ado, I’ll ask Mr. Omiesh first to speak.

ESAM OMIESH: Thank you very much. Dr. Ottaway, thank you very much for the opportunity to be with you. Good afternoon, everybody. I’d like to extend my gratitude and thanks to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and their Middle East program and center for taking the lead in addressing some of the critical issues that are relevant to the Libyan issue and for them to pick such a timely topic as the events have it.

You know, today we have our – Secretary Clinton is on her way to Istanbul to meet in the fourth meeting of the contact group for them to discuss, and high on the agenda – in fact, it is one of the main three issues that are being discussed – is issues that deal with the transition in Tripoli, in Libya, the post-Gadhafi reality and things that we need to either prepare for or at the same time be ready to tackle.

And it also comes at a time when we are seeing a fair amount of new activity on the ground despite what many people have termed a stalemate, even though that’s not really a good assessment of the situation, and that there is progress on the ground, whether it’s in the capacity of the resistance and the freedom fighters advancing and taking
hold of the areas surrounding Tripoli or whether it’s in the newly achieved union of the forces on the ground to try to coordinate their efforts to oust the regime and stop its atrocities – and at the same time, the heightened sense that there is need for international engagement strong enough to effect a resolution to the matter, whether it be in the political realm where there is a strong feeling that the Gadhafi regime is finally getting to a point where it’s sending messages to accept its ouster in ways that are closer to bring forth the parties as such.

So I think it’s a very critical time for us to be not only thinking ahead as to what happens post-Gadhafi but also to think of the immediate situation at hand.

And transition, by definition, is a period that it proceeds immediately from the fall of the regime until we reach the ultimate objective of, you know, having a stable democracy or even the beginnings of a democracy with elected institutions and a structure of governance that allows it to sustain its march towards democracy.

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And national – the Transitional National Council has been keen from the beginning through its leadership and through its executive team, you know, to put that in the discussion and at all times to make sure that we’re not caught into just the events of the day and forgetting about what may happen tomorrow.

And I think it’s an important reflection, and that’s what I’ll focus on, is to be able to reflect on what has been transpiring within the TNC and what is at stake right now from their perspective so that we can complete the picture as we discuss it from what we think ought to be done from maybe an American and a Libyan-American perspective or what the international community wishes to see, but at the same time, what is the TNC – the Transitional National Council – is thinking about, what are they projecting as this happens so that we can either help them modify it, improve on it, or at the same time be ready to help them implement this as it moves forward.

And I think it’s important to see this through the gaze of their political committees, the president of the council as well as the head of the executive committee that is taking care of the affairs of the TNC, especially in the international arena.

And lastly, just to say that it is also one of the issues that the TNC is taking forth to the Istanbul convention – or to the Istanbul meeting with the contact group – is that they are coming with more concrete plans to be presented at the conference as to what this transition entails.

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One of the very interesting observations that you see when you are looking at these – some of these are documents in evolution, and some of them are documents – I mean, recent statements and position statements that are coming forth that are shedding light on what that transition would look like – but one of the key things was an initial willingness and an initial interest to align any transition with the international mandates. Dr. Jalil specifically – and he was one of the earlier people who drafted the earlier roadmaps that were being, you know, considered as this transition was unfolding and this was way back in April.

And when I say way back, it does seem like it’s a way back. You know, it’s only a couple of months ago but it is – so much has happened since.
But he wanted to have a plan that was consistent with mandates that were asked of them by the U.N. Resolution 1973, you know, meaning there is an immediate cease-fire and there is a process that meets the legitimate demands of the Libyan people, and he paralleled a lot of his exposition on that. And I will go over some of that.

The other thing that you see is very clear is that it’s stemming from a more comprehensive vision, a vision for a new democratic Libya, constitutionally-based, one that cherishes the very basic freedoms that are essential and that are acknowledged worldwide – freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, at the same time, one that sets the standards that sustains a democratic model and moves it into the future. And then they talk about a more concrete plan on how to implement this in a stepwise process.

So it does reflect a sense of political awareness, a sense of connectedness to the international community and to the world at large, and to be able to, you know, expound upon a vision that will allow the TNC to hit the ground running, if you may, when things change while of course maintaining the fight on the ground. So I think that’s a very important preface to looking at the specifics of this.

Recently, Mr. Abdul Jalil in a recent interview about a month ago, he was asked – and in the context of these questions, the issue that we need to shed some light on is the issue of what do we do about political settlements, you know, because now they’re becoming a pressing issue, given, you know, people’s assessment that, you know, short of a decisive, clear victory that allows us to move on directly into the transition, we are looking at a period of time that’s going to force us, in a sense, to engage the current realities of the ground.

Dr. Jalil actually in his document even early then has laid out three scenarios. He basically said that we’re prepared to work beyond these three scenarios. The first scenario is a free, unified liberated Libya; and then, you know, he said, then we move directly to the implementation and we start working on national reconciliation and international work – but plus a political process for the transition, which I will come back to.

But he also laid out a scenario too where he said basically, you know, reading it as it is, you know, air force – or a no-fly zone with an air power that is – whose mandate or which mandate is to protect civilians is not necessarily capable of changing the game on the ground.

And with that, there has to be a strong enough resistance and ability to overcome the realities on the ground, especially meaning – you know, meaning the military and the militias of Gadhafi. And knowing the fact that this is a civilian population which, you know, essentially was demanding its own basic rights and was forced into a fight, you know, there has to be a process of equipping and training and rebuilding a army.

And so he is basically laying out a scenario where it’s going to be more prolonged. It’s going to be about weakening the capacity of the regime to be a mortal threat to the Libyan people. It’s about creating a process that will allow them to overcome that challenge, and continuing the economic pressures and the international community’s pressure to effect the change.

And in that process, he also laid out what can we do in order to overcome what we term a stalemate when we see the need for a political settlement, while at the same time maintaining the pressure enough to effect a real change on the ground. And I think that’s where we are today.
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I mean, we are looking at a regime that is spent, that is incapable of mounting an offensive strong enough to change the picture, still lethal enough to cause some damage but at the same time is looking for a way out.

You have an emboldened and empowered resistance that has kept its leadership unified, that has tried very hard to rule itself and govern itself, and reached out to the international community and succeeded in building that momentum.

And we have an indigent national community that is, for the most part, on a strong will. It is focused on the mission in Libya and it’s not distracted by many things, despite the shortcomings here and there and despite maybe some of the fallouts of certain actions. But for the most part there is a consensus and strong will.

So that scenario, he basically reflected on four conditions to come forth that will allow us to move immediately into a transition. And he basically said that there has to be an immediate cease-fire that’s effected on the ground by the Gadhafi forces. Again, the Libyan people, the civilians, the freedom fighters, we’re not the ones who started the war, nor are they the ones who are attacking others. They are defending themselves and they are liberating their people from the aggression of Gadhafi.

And so the immediate cease-fire is something that has to happen, with pulling out of all the regime troops from both the occupied and the besieged cities, then immediately addressing the humanitarian crisis that is the leftover of that conflict and creating humanitarian safe zones under U.N. observers to enable humanitarian aid to come in.

Thirdly, an immediate release of all of the detainees, and then fourthly – and he’s left that as part of that political process – arranging for the implementation or the safe exit of Gadhafi and his family.

Now, one thing that needs to be highlighted as well that throughout this discussion and throughout the TNC’s engagement of this issue, whether it’s in the political engagement or whether it’s in, you know, what if something happens – it has always been clear that it’s a precondition for the TNC that Gadhafi and his family – they have to go and they are no longer part of the political scene in Libya.

And so I think the futile attempts of the Gadhafi regime to argue along the lines of including Seif, his son, maybe, in the political process or allowing some degree of engagement for him to be in that political process, I think, is a no-starter.

And I think the AU, which has been championing some of the – trying to push some of the solutions that were still having Gadhafi as a role in it is themselves modifying – being modified. And more importantly, it’s now the regime who is signaling through his emissaries and his inner folks that this is no longer a condition that has to be part of the process.

So we’re looking at a scenario that if it were to happen, these conditions need to be implemented. Now, what happens next – and this is the part that I think that reflects upon this discussion that we’re having now, which is the transition.

One thing that – or a few things that come out as observations – first, before the mechanisms of it is, first, they are very keen – the TNC and the Libyan people are very keen in achieving their vision, that vision of a unified Libya, a
vision of an inclusive Libya, a vision of a democratic Libya that is, you know, equipped to catch up with the international community and to join in the 21st century when it comes to effecting the norms of, you know, the human rights, the rule of law, the rule by constitution and the freedoms that are to become part and parcel of their system. And so, you know, for them it’s a process that will put these steps in motion.

If you look at – there is some evolution of some of the technicalities and some of the concepts that are involved but in general you’ll see three major principles that are laid out immediately.

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One is this: the Transitional National Council, which is considered a temporary body. And in fact they have – they have required that the members of the Transitional National Council take a pledge that they will not seek political office in the first election simply because they wanted to make sure that they get people who have no interest, no personal, you know, interest and things along those lines to do it.

But the second component that they feel very strongly about is that Libya is not yet completely liberated, and that Tripoli and the west weigh in very heavily in the formula of a united Libya. So the first thing that will happen is the expansion of the council itself to become that governing – that transitional governing body immediately. And so they started off with 31 members.

Some of them were actually not named because of the concern over their safety and because they do represent areas that are outside the eastern part of Libya. They have since expanded it since the meetings that have taken place in Dubai and the meetings of the tribal leaders and the meetings of the people from the west. And so they are trying to build that and expand that number.

But now they’re discussing on the assessment of their political director, and this is the latest version of – the final layout of it is to expand that council to 60 members.

And they will be chosen immediately from the areas that have eventually been liberated, namely Tripoli, of course, being the main; of course, the other city councils that are in the other areas that are still battling – Misurata and the western mountain, and things – and those cities will – some of them do already have representation, but they will expand it to proportionality so that that council, you know, gets formed immediately.

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One of its first mandates – and they give numbers – you know, they talk about within two weeks, it is to assign an interim government that will conduct the business of ruling or governing the country.

They also make very clear points about the inclusion of members of the old technocrats from the Libyan government – those who know the country well and those who have basically done the business of governing and conducting the affairs of the society itself – and they also emphasized the need to include capable military personnel as well as capable security personnel to make sure that they are able to sustain law and order in that immediate transition period.

That government is supervised, of course, by the expanded now transitional council which is also required to call in to a 15-member body to start drafting a constitution for the country, and they’re given a 45-day period where that constitution is to be drafted, revised, reviewed and then ultimately put to a national referendum where it is voted on and accepted by the people of Libya.
Once that constitution is approved, within that constitution of course is – there’s the setup of the government itself, of the legislative body, the presidential system, the parliamentarian. I think that’s a discussion that’s ongoing that needs to be matured and developed and reflected based on the opinion of the Libyan people and the leaders of the Libyan people.

And then what will be put in place is a legislative or parliamentarian election that is to be taking place in four months from the acceptance or the adoption of the national constitution through a national referendum that is aided by the U.N. and U.N. observers. And once that parliament or that congress is elected, two months from the completion of those elections you will have the presidential elections.

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And again, this is the assumption that this is more of a presidential system, arguably. I guess there’s an election of the president whereas if they chose otherwise it could be some other modifications.

But the point is that they are already setting timelines, and they’re already setting marks for them as they adopt those systems moving forward. Expectations is that it will take anywhere between 10 to 13 months. And this is literally on the reports of the political director only about two weeks ago. And I’m looking forward to seeing what they would present in Istanbul.

I think that would have the culmination of a lot of these different components that they have been discussing, very clear in its intent on being inclusive, and ensuring that power is vested in the people and that these institutions that are being nurtured and developed are in fact representative.

You know, they talk about proportionality. They talk about making sure that all parts of the country are represented. They talk about the role of the important segments of society and they talk about the role of women. They talk about the role of minorities. They talk about religious freedom.

There has, in fact, been a very interesting discussion just less than 10 days ago about, you know, it’s very interesting how, you know, in majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East and throughout, there’s always this one component of the constitution where you say Islam is the religion of the land or Islam is the religion of the republic. It’s a standard component of any constitution.

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But then the second part that follows has always been somewhat of an issue of contention – is to say Islam is the major or is the only source of legislation versus saying that it is a source of legislation.

And an interesting discussion took place within the council where they were saying, you know, well, all of us are Muslim, you know, of course Islam is the source of legislation, while people with maybe a little bit more political, you know, nuances and maturity said, well, no, I mean, you have to consider, you know, the idea of the minorities in the country or people, you know, or being able to, you know, address political issues in different contexts.

And so it is “a” source, and I think that – and by the way, the council eventually voted for the “a source” as opposed to the “the source” in a sense that they are looking at new political realities. They are recognizing the role that they need to, you know, address these issues up front. But at the same time it’s also recognition that, you know, Libya, you know, more so than any other country is very unique in the sense that it is homogenous, it is –
there’s no ethnic except for – now, there is a very small minority of Berbers. But they have been – they are actually a glue to the Libyan society. They have been not only in there fighting in there, but they are part of Tripoli. They’re part of Benghazi. They’re part of every part of Libya. And so there’s no enclaves where they can be labeled that they’re, you know, areas and there is risk for a breaking in any of this. There’s plenty of ties that brings people together.

But outside from that, you know, the religion is Islam. It’s Sunni. It’s even, you know, Maliki for the most part, which is, you know, for the – so it’s very – there’s a lot of unity that brings people forth. And even the tribes that have been raised as a potential issue of division is in fact – you know, members of those tribes are all over Libya. There’s intermarriage. There is a lot of social ties that makes this not a significant concern for division.

And I think it’s been very clear from the set-go that the unity of Libya is paramount. So I think the outcome is promising. I think we see a lot of the seeds for a good outcome as it moves forward. But I think the reality on the ground is that it’s still pretty precarious; it’s pretty fragile.

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And I think that the real test comes when the transition takes place, and the ability of the council as well as the Libyan people as a whole to, you know, come together as one in building their nation. So I hope and pray that we see that come to fruition.

And our role – and one of the – and I’ll conclude with this – Dr. Jalil mentioned one of the things that he actually highlighted was the role of the international community upfront. And he called actually for an international conference that happens immediately for Libya’s reconstruction and how the international community can help.

Certainly for us as Libyan-Americans and certainly as a nation that has a great influence in many parts of the world, we need to optimize our ability to help the nascent democracy in Libya to flourish and to take hold and to build the support mechanisms needed for us to give them everything – every reason to succeed. And I hope that that’s what happens. Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you, Doctor. Fadel?

FADEL LAMEN: Thank you. I’m just going to grab this. OK. Thank you very much, Dr. Ottaway, and thanks to the Carnegie Endowment for hosting this event. Good afternoon. I hope that you are not all sleepy after the good lunch. (Chuckles.) Esam said, well, it looks like a little bit of a heavy lunch, a doctor’s view of the lunch.

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So you guys be careful. You might need to exercise after that. You don’t want to go and see him, right? God forbid. (Chuckles.) Two people you don’t want to see, a lawyer and a doctor, right? (Chuckles.) Unless there is something wrong.

Anyway, my name is Fadel al-Ameen and I’m the president of American-Libyan Council. I just want to thank Dr. Esam here for his excellent introduction and what I will call the aspiration list, the wishful list, the theoretical view this is what the Libyans want. And I think the question will be, can it be applied? Who will do it and can – do they need help to do it, and what kind of help?
And I think this is the – these are the practical part. And I would like to address this since he mentioned all these things, which they are great, and I think that shows that there is an interest in developing fledgling democracy in Libya after 42 years of dictatorship plus anarchy plus, Dr. Ottaway said, their unique system.

It’s no system. I wrote after my first visit to Libya in a long time in 2009, I said, this is a stateless state. It’s a state before an authoritarian state. So to move to an authoritarian state, it’s a development in Libya. But I guess it didn’t. I mean, in itself –

MS. OTTAWAY: (Chuckles) – I hope you can move beyond –

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MR. LAMEN: So hopefully now I think we just skip the whole thing and probably will be moving – transitioning to democracy. I wouldn’t say that Libya very soon will be a fledgling democracy. But hopefully we will be in the right direction with all the help of the friends of Libya.

So let me start by Professor Daniel Byman who wrote a very excellent article on the Financial Times a few weeks ago. He said, beware of the perils of Libya after Gadhafi has gone. And he said, we really badly need to learn more about the key players. Who will be carrying all this list of good stuff, good wishes and intentions? And I think that will be the question.

Would the TNC by itself can carry that? Can it lead Libya the way we would like it to? Is it the only player in Libya? And I think to define the key players is part of what I will be discussing with you, plus what will be the international role or how they can help, how can we all help.

I think as much as we love and we, you know, recognize the TNC as the legitimate representation – representative of the Libyan people right now – and it’s been recognized by many, many countries, and they are racking recognitions every day, thank God; that’s great – but they are also one of the major players. It’s an umbrella. It’s not an organization that functions running the country on a daily basis, not an executive body. And at the same time it’s not like a legislative body of sorts.

It’s a mix of two. It’s a hybrid, some kind of a hybrid organization that is – it’s trying – and I think on the top of this organization, the TNC, which is, since I’m speaking about the major players, is the top of the players. It’s the first player.

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And on the top of this organization is Judge Abdul Jalil, who is, I think, the person that most of the people – all the Libyans – there is some kind of a consensus on that person. And thank God because I think that’s where we start. There is at least one person the people are willing to recognize and respect and listen to and respect the leadership.

After Mr. Abdul Jalil, there are other numbers of people who have – you know, here and there they have some support here, and some kind of people have some issues with here and there, which is typical for any country, especially when we – a country and a people when they haven’t had freedom in 42 years, when they sense the first thing is they want to see freedom.

So the first thing after 42 years of not able to say no, I think they will use the word no so many times until they get tired of it. For a long time they haven’t had the chance to demonstrate against anything. So now you will see daily
demonstrations in Benghazi and Libya, mostly for Benghazi and other countries too because they just want to say no and they just want to protest. And so that’s also a recognition.

This transition to freedom – freedom can always be a little bit chaotic. And I think we are seeing some of the elements of chaos and since the people – they don’t want to listen to anybody. They don’t want to be told what to do. Everybody has an opinion. Everybody thinks their opinion is the best opinion, bless you. And so I think it’s very, very important that they feel that they need to express these views.

Sometimes they take their views, you know, criticizing other members of the TNC and so on and so forth. So we have the TNC and some of its members, some of them are controversial. Others are not. Then we have the local councils and the smaller cities. Who is running the country? Is it the TNC running the country? Who is running the daily affairs of the Libyan(s) in Benghazi?

It’s not the TNC, even though a lot of people are, you know, confused. Is it the responsibility of the TNC to run it, or is the local council is in every city? There are local councils in every city. They should have plans. They should have ideas. They should have an executive body that runs the affairs, from providing health, transportation, economic development, whatever there, if it’s possible, to have all these kind of daily mundane things that people have to do in their local communities.

But some, they don’t. For example, we haven’t education system in the eastern part of the country, have not started back again on its track. Why? There is a problem there. What would be? Is it the responsibility of this? Who is the player responsible for this and what can be done about it?

So we have local councils who wield some kind of power in their local areas. We have regional and local councils in the conflict zones. Esam talked about Misurata, for example. It’s the third largest city. So the council of Misurata is a very strong council and whatever they say, people have to listen, you know, to their point of view in the future because they fought hard, they liberated their country. They earned their freedom and, you know, they are not going to give it to anybody very easily. They are not going to yield that kind of freedom to anybody very easily.

And I think they have to be included and they have to be convinced. They have to be dealt with. So you have very strong-willed people there.

You have Tripoli which is – Benghazi always has been – and there is no offense; I was born in Benghazi. I am half from the western part of the country and half from the eastern part of the country, so I can talk freely and criticize everybody and nobody can say anything about me, you know? (Laughter.)

You know, Benghazi is always considered the cultural capital of Libya. It has never been the political area or region of Libya. So the cultural, intellectual activities, poets, writers, you always see so many of them in Benghazi. The cultural life in Benghazi is very rich. But Tripoli has always been the political capital of the country.

Even people who are from other regions who are political and involved in politics, they always end up being in Tripoli not just because Gadhafi tried so many times to move the capital from Tripoli to Sirte. I think he even thought about some other places just very deep in the south thinking about how can I destroy Tripoli and make it not worthy or not recognizable. But he failed.
So he came back and made sure that he settled his best forces and supporters – moved them to Tripoli. And that’s part of the reason why Tripoli is having a lot of difficulty because there are a lot of Gadhafi supporters from all over the country. They are all gathered in Tripoli and making sure that they have a stronghold in Tripoli.

Of course how many councils are in Tripoli? We don’t know. There are at least four of them mentioned that are major players. They’re trying to incorporate themselves. And Tripoli can be a game changer.

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It is – when Tripoli falls, I think if the TNC and the international community and all of us, if we are not ready for that change, it may – events may just even bypass the TNC as we know it right now if the TNC does not evolve and develop itself to be ready for that day. Because the force that will come out of that change, of that development, will be so hard, so big – I think an enormous change that we have to keep in mind because it is the largest city and the capital of the country.

And also we have the councils for the Nafusa Mountains. They are fighting there. They fought very hard. They did a great job and they are doing a great job. And I think they will be instrumental in delivering Tripoli hopefully in the near future. So they have to be recognized not because they are Berber. Not all of them are Berber. By the way, I have some Berber in me too. So I can talk about the Berber too. (Laughter.) I have some Italian too.

But it’s just because they are – that shows the Libyans are – when people talk about tribes, there is no just – the tribes in Libya are a social phenomenon. They are not really demographic or political socioeconomic phenomenon. They are not. They are not. And I think Gadhafi tried to use the tribes early on and he failed. He failed miserably. And he failed to divide – tried to divide the country and he failed.

So it shows you two things: that Libya is not ready to be divided; Libyan tribes are not major players. So take these two things away and forget about them and don’t use them in your analysis, please, because you’ll come to the wrong conclusions.

Then we have – besides all councils we have the Coalition of the 17th of February. These are a group of lawyers and judges and others who fancy themselves – and I’m sure they did a lot of great work – that they are behind the revolution of the 17th.

[00:42:08]

So they said, we are the – we are the force that inspired the TNC. We were the people who put the TNC and choose that body. So the TNC should be subjected to us. They should listen to us. We are bigger. We represent the revolution – which can be nice but it can be very dangerous because what they call the revolutionary legitimacy that people might claim that we are the one who tells you what to do because we started everything. So there is some feeling among these people that they are.

And the other thing they did is, they decided to close that coalition. So nobody can apply. If you are in, you’re in. If you are out, you’re out. Tough luck, you know. It doesn’t matter. And it is challenging. It does challenge the TNC from time to time through challenging some of its ruling(s) or decisions.
Sometimes they start, you know – they demonstrate against the TNC and against others. The last thing they did, they were very adamant against what people may have heard of a possible meeting for Libyans in Italy, in Rome, the Rome Conference, which is supposed to bring all Libyans from all over the diaspora and from within Libya itself.

They felt that this is something that may challenge their authority or their presence. And they fought very hard until that council – that conference was cancelled. So we have to keep these people in mind. They are lawyers, after all, and judges. They can argue. They can convince. They can do a lot of things. They can get you into trouble.

And also we have the Islamists. I think that’s one of the most important elements in this society, not because they are big in terms of numbers but of their organization. They are well-organized, and I think they are very focused on their agenda. Some of them are moderate. Others of them are not. Muslim Brotherhood is considered a moderate organization. It’s more traditional than other Muslim brotherhoods in the region like the one in Tunisia or other places.

It’s more closer in its view to the traditional Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, their view of politics, of their place, even though that, you know, freedom can change a lot of things, as we have seen in Egypt. So these are players and they are very strong player(s). They have members in the TNC. They have a vision. They have an idea of what they want.

They want an Islamic state, a moderate Islamic state with civil society and so on and so forth. It hasn’t been defined yet. But I think they work. They work very hard and they are part of the Libyan fabric and they have to be dealt with. They have to be talked to and included.

There are people who are within the TNC that they see themselves that they should play a role outside the TNC, that they have future aspirations. And also we have the opposition groups that they were outside the country for a while, like the National Salvation of Libya. They have the National Libyan Council and others who were opposing Gadhafi for a long time and they are looking to get back to the country and play a very constructive role. And they are planning and they are active and working very hard. And they have a view of how things should go.

Of course, that’s outside the former members of the – we have the technocrats and we have the military, people who were in the military or former military people. They are a part of the old regime, former Revolutionary Committee members who left or maybe they haven’t. But they are not – they’re still part of the Libyan society.

So these people are – they are organized. I think if we have to think about the two organized entities in Libya after Gadhafi and his own little clannish group of people that ran the country for a long period of time, is the Revolutionary Committee, the committees that he organized, and the syndicates.

Even though the syndicates have no teeth for a long time, the syndicates for lawyers, the journalist syndicates, other syndicates, that they are – I am not a big fan of syndicates anyway because I think they – especially in the Arab world I think they totally – mostly then end up totally depending on the regimes.

And I think the whole principle needs to be changed and evolved. But these syndicates can play a role. I think they can be revived, and they can play a good role as part of the players if we want to develop civil society. So we have to think of those.
There are some liberals, secularists, democrats from the old regime or the old leftists or the former political prisoners. These are very influential. They are good writers. They are good thinkers. They have a presence in the country and they have to be included in the process, and they are active. And I think they are right now – since the Islamists now develop an organized trend that they see – these members right now, they are working closely to develop another trend of democratic, more liberal, nonreligious trend that they feel that they should be part of.

Of course, Tripoli is a different issue because we don’t know much about Tripoli except that it’s still under Gadhafi. But I think most of the – what I mentioned about (except the ?) councils, the four councils I mentioned, most of the other things, former regimes, technocrats and liberals and Islamists and so on and so forth, they are also, you know, present in Tripoli. So Tripoli is a mix of all those minus the TNC itself as an organization, even though there are some members of the Tripoli councils that are members of the TNC.

The other group of people that we should be concerned about also there, there are a number of military militias right now in Libya. Some of these groups that I mentioned, they have their own militias or their own military brigades because everybody is fighting Gadhafi. So nobody is fighting each other. So there is the guy there that everybody wants to – the enemy. So – and everybody’s directing their firepower toward that. The TNC until now was not able and is not able to unite, unify who carries a gun and who holds a gun and who should be where.

So you’ll see roaming militias here and there in Benghazi and probably in other parts of the country too. They are probably – if you own a gun and if you have a gun, you can force your will or force yourself somehow in the process. So I think one of the challenges will be how can we take these guns away and have people sit and talk as soon as possible. So that’s – these are some of the players that we are looking at.

And so while the TNC, with all the goodwill, or the goodwill of the Libyan – of the aspiration of the Libyan – want to do all these things that Dr. Omiesh was mentioning, who is going to carry it? These are the players, and these are not bad players. So they are mostly – I think through some dialogue – and everybody, you know, gets rid of their own, you know, euphoria about freedom and saying no to everything – I think maybe people can sit down and come and have a decent conversation.

But I think mostly this conversation – if I am at odd with Esam and I invite him to a meeting, probably he would not come and say, what would be the agenda? No, I’m not going to go there to his turf because he is going to influence me.

So I think an honest broker will be – and definitely the honest broker should not be the Arab League or any Arab countries, not Algeria of course. (Laughter.) Qatar tried to play that role but definitely I don’t think they are qualified with all the appreciation for their support of the Libyan people. So I think that’s where the leadership of the United States, of the international community – and that will be my segue to what can be done to help the Libyan people.

So after the liberation of Sarajevo, President Clinton was visiting there and he said, it’s not enough to end the war. We must build the peace. And it’s not enough to reject the dark past. But we must build a bright future. And I think that’s very, very important. I think sometimes we have the tendency to drop the ball.
There is so much goodwill that the international community have with the Libyan people. You see the – my sister called me from Tripoli. She said, well, I watched the Gadhafi TV from time to time, and please tell TNC – she thinks that I have a red phone, you know. I do have contacts with them, of course, but I don’t pick it up because my sister asks me to. But she has a good point.

She said, tell the TNC people and the others, lay off this showing all these Western flags especially during the Friday prayers because the Libya regime is using that against us, you know, saying, look at them, they are worshipping the West and they are impacted by the Crusaders, and so on and so forth.

But the Libyan people, they are raising these flags. They are carrying these flags. They are waving these flags of France, of the United States, of Western powers who came to help them. You know how long – it’s the easiest thing for an Arab or a Muslim to step on a flag or to burn it, to tell you the truth, because there is a lot of history (impact?).

But for an Arab or a Muslim to come and carry another country’s flag or the United States flag or a Western flag, it takes a lot of them. So I think that should be the level of happiness and appreciation that these people have. And it’s the level of the goodwill that the United States, NATO and Western Europe and even the United Nations have with the Libyan people.

But the dangers can be squandered. I think we have the tendency sometimes to not finish the job. And I think that’s where we need to understand that if we don’t do it, if we do not finish the job, I think this appreciation and euphoria and, you know, love and all these kind of things, they will turn to despair, anger, abandonment, you name it.

I’m not a psychologist so I can’t tell you about all the gambit of human emotions that people will go through to feel after a letdown. But there will be a letdown and that letdown will lead to – not only to anger. It will lead to despair and it will lead to the rise of level of conspiracy theories where people fear, oh yeah, they didn’t come for the right reason.

They came here for the oil. That kind of conspiracy, that will fester and it will – all what have been done, it will be lost. Not only that, that all these emotions, they may turn into anger and they may turn into hate which is something that we have experience in the Arab world and the Muslim world. And we don’t like it; we don’t want it; and we don’t want to foster it. As a matter of fact, we should try to get rid of it as much as possible.

So should America be a leading – play a leading role in this? Yeah. Everybody is saying America is playing – you know, one of the American officials from the White House, he said, well, America is leading.

It’s leading from behind. It doesn’t work this way. America has to lead it from the front. I think – well, more my appreciation of the Europeans and what they do. I think we’ve been leading the Europeans since World War II. I think as soon as we drop our lead for the world, I think the world will become very chaotic.

So I think this is our destiny and I think we should embrace it, love it, respect it and work on it and make sure that we do it right because otherwise everybody’s talking about the French now. They are trying to talk to Gadhafi and Gadhafi’s talking to the French. Of course, Gadhafi’s son, he said, I – what did – I supported Sarkozy’s presidential
campaign. We funded him with a lot of money, and he should not talk and so on, and how can he abandon us. So I don’t know what they have for each other. (Laughter.) But whatever that is, is something that we keep in mind.

What do we need? I think first thing we need for the transition is security. You want to stabilize the country, right, and I think that should be done – bring in security, getting rid of the weapons and making sure the country transitions. Because without security, I don’t think anything can be done – no freedom, no democracy, no nothing, no functioning institution, nothing – so a lot of political exclusion, violence and human rights must be – must give way to the rule of law and a participatory government.

We don’t have ethnic or religious but we may have an ideological confrontation that should be dealt with through national reconciliation. So that’s another thing we have to focus on very, very, very hard. It should be one of these.

[00:56:18]

Revenge and mismanagement of the economy and the reconstruction of the economy – because these guys, these kids, they are running with their machine guns and their Kalashnikovs. OK, you want them to give them up, right? You’ve got to give them a job. You’ve got to find them a way. You’ve got to get them to school. You’ve got to get them to where they have to say, yeah, it’s not – I will not be a career fighter or mujahid. I just want to be, you know, a lawyer or a professor or a teacher or somebody that who can be useful and can have a peaceful beautiful future.

So then we have to support that. We have to find an alternative to this. I think the economy and helping develop the economy – and we want to rebuild the economy. The nice thing about Libya is it’s because it’s chaotic and it’s a system that has no – not really a system. I think we can rebuild it and we can do it right, you know. So we have a lot of money. I think I said Libya, like maybe like Norway. I mean, they have a lot of oil and they’re a small population. And there is a possibility they can do.

So can we rebuild the economy to have an economy does not depend on oil? It can use oil for future revenues but should not completely depend on oil because what after the oil? And we’ve seen the impact. Oil can be good. It can be a recipe for – as a resource it can be a recipe for corruption and disaster.

[00:57:46]

And I just will end by saying that the United Nations can play a good role. Europeans and NATO can play a great role too. I think the United Nations may lead in some way. But I think the United States, ultimately it is the United States’ responsibility as it’s supported this effort from the beginning to play a leading role from in front. And I think there are so many things that we can do to bring people – the Libyan people have that kind of yearning for freedom.

But because they were enclosed for 40 years, it’s very, very difficult. They are not aware of so many other countries’ experience, past and present, how to move from point A to point B. Gadhafi made sure that people who stayed in power, that he used people who cannot think, who cannot be creative, who cannot lead so he can lead them.

So the technocrats that we are talking about, they are very limited in what they can do. And I think the international support and showing the way of practical steps toward reconstruction and reconciliation and transition to democracies, they are a must. Thank you.
MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. Well, thank you for two very interesting presentations. I open the floor now for questions. Please identify yourself. Yes, back there, then third row.

Q: Dr. Omiesh, you were going very fast and I missed how you were envisaging a constitution prepared. This seems to me to be perhaps the most vital step in the transition you’re talking about. Who’s going to write this constitution? How’s it going to be done? Is it an open and transparent process? Is it behind closed doors? Can you give us a hint?

DR. OMIESH: Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: Let me take –

DR. OMIESH: Oh, I'm sorry.

[00:59:52]

MS. OTTAWAY: Let me take two or three questions. Yes, here in front? Microphone here in front, please. OK.

Q: Thank you. Allen Keiswetter from C&O Resources. I think this is a question for Fadel. I had envisioned the TNC as being a composite of various organizations and groups and you portray them as being a part – not a part of but apart from these groups. So I wish you’d talk a little more about the relationships between the TNC and the various organizations.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK, yes, there in the center? Yeah.

Q: John Herbst from NDU. Let’s see now, who was this for? Fadel, I think you correctly said that we really don’t know who has effective influence and power in Libya. Since we don’t know that, how can we possibly know what’s going to happen if Gadhafi in fact goes?

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you.

DR. OMIESH: Let me start with the first. You take the last two. The issue on the constitution, I think it’s a very valid question and I think that’s where we can come in, whether as Libyans in the diaspora or even as international players, to insist on certain standards that need to be met when that process takes place.

[01:01:19]

But what has been discussed so far was a committee of 15 which will have 45 days to draft a constitution. Now, you’re talking about – you know, there is certainly technical expertise. And there are certainly judges and lawyers and university professors and law professors who are – and constitutional law professors for that matter – who are capable of taking on the process itself, at least in providing the drafting of a viable constitution.

But I think if you look at the challenge of the choices that must be met that can be translated into a constitution, what is the system of governance that would be most befitting of Libya, even as it aims to join the international community and the world?

You know, there is plenty of models that are out there that need to be looked into and a system adopted, if you may, in moving forth with. And so enlisting the expertise that’s available and certainly one that’s available here in
Washington and in America and in other parts where that level of expertise can be provided would prove to be very essential to this process even at this time before that takes place.

But as we know right now, it is a committee that will be appointed by the expanded council. That is – again, the number that has been touted is up to 15, and the mandate that was given is 45 days for it to implement. But I think any more detail into that needs to be looked upon with a magnifying glass, and really identifying the certain components that will need to be injected into it and the certain standards that it has to meet in order for it to become something that I think we can reliably use as a basis for a new state.

MR. LAMEN: Of course, I wish – personally I wish they will – they will adopt a transitional constitution and give the people time enough to think when everything settles down to come up with a permanent constitution. I think that will be a good idea. You don't want to rush to vote for a final constitution before people get an idea and have enough confidence and information that they come, that otherwise they will get stuck. And I think the example of Iraq is a good example that we don’t want to repeat.

[01:03:58]

Going back to your question and the other gentleman’s question, I think I said that TNC is an umbrella and I think they are an umbrella. Are they an effective umbrella? Are they including everybody? The Libyan people in general – I don’t think I’ve seen anybody in Libya, at least inside the country or outside the country, that came about and challenged the legitimacy of the TNC or said that it does not represent the Libyan people, I think. But do they do everything right?

No, I think I would be doing them a disservice by painting this rosy picture of TNC that everything is hunky-dory and everybody is doing everything great. No. I think they need criticism. One of the problems is they are the legislative and the executive together. So they don’t listen to each other. I think the expansion that Dr. Omiesh was talking about is a step in the right direction.

We are trying to help them come up with a charter for how they conduct business, how they separate the executive from the general. I think that’s part of it. How they are able – see, it’s very dicey, very, very, very delicate situation because they don’t want to push so hard so they would have people reject them.

At the same time, they want to assert their – assert their presence and their authority as much as they can leave. There is a very interesting – there is a rebellion against anything central in Libya right now.

[01:05:32]

And I think balancing these acts – but they’re – still, I think they are the legitimate representative and I think they have the power and the capabilities if they expand, if they take care of some loose ends, if they develop enough – and hopefully they do in the next few weeks probably – they will be able to fill the power vacuum that was mentioned.

And I think they are the only. And I think that’s why we push them. We prep them. We support them and we tell them when they do something wrong that they need to fix it. And I think that’s the only way we can get them better because the alternative is a vacuum that is – that would be very, very dangerous in Libya.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. Let’s start with the gentleman back – yes, you? (Chuckles.)
Q: My name is Yaya Fanusie. I am the lead person, special operations division for the United States of Africa 2017 Project Task Force. I listened to you guys. Let me tell you something. The African Union role – what they are telling you guys is the watered version of what we have been giving them, OK?

Let me give you something that you'll be hearing very soon that they're not telling you from there. Gadhafi – we were the one who recruited Gadhafi 18 years ago to become part of United States of Africa 20 – it was 2015 but it became the 2017 project. And I'm telling you clearly if Gadhafi goes, a group within that task force which is anti-Arabs will become dominant and they'll want all Arabs to leave Africa.

[01:07:29]

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. Yes, Saeb – Saeb first. Yeah?

Q: Thank you. My name is Saeb Erekat from al-Quds daily newspaper. Yesterday, the secretary of State in a joint press conference with the Russian foreign minister said that Gadhafi’s days were numbered.

Do you agree, and can you give, like, a time thing on that? And second, the Russian envoy that met with Gadhafi said that Gadhafi is going – has a grand sort of suicidal plan to blow Tripoli out of existence. Could you share with us some of the information that you might have on that?

DR. OMIESH: No, I think with that, what's interesting about Secretary Clinton’s comment was the fact that she used hours and days. She didn’t even use weeks, which was – (chuckles). So that's very numbered, I hope.

But then again the point is that I think the one key factor that has made things come to the surface a little bit more of late has been the fact that there is more intelligence coming of the activities of the people around Gadhafi.

And that for the first time there is a scene where his emissaries and his – even people who speak for him such as Baghdad Mahmoudi, you know, they are talking about discussing the option of Gadhafi not being part of the future Libya. And this is where that transition has happened.

Before that, they have tried the – the statement of, you know, it’s everything but, you know, Gadhafi. He’s not really a leader. He’s a symbol. He’s this. He’s that. Now they’re saying, well, you know – there is that message that's being across.

Secretary Clinton highlighted it as mixed signals. She said you know, we’re hearing some but it’s still mixed signals. So I think that change is in the making. The fact is that Gadhafi for the first time considering the facts on the ground is looking at this and realizing that if he insists on either himself or a role for his son, arguably that’s still a card he’s playing.

[01:09:35]

But at least as far as him himself being part of future Libya is becoming an accepted – you know, he’s given the green light, if you may, to his close, you know, people to start saying that. And so I think that’s worthy of notice.

In terms of the second, which is the threat, again, I think to underestimate Gadhafi would be way too foolish. I mean, the man learned how to survive for 42 years.
He is clearly maybe very capable in an evil way, if you may. You know, I mean he is sort of a survivor, you know, and so he is – I think he’s putting cards on the table right now. I think the threat was specifically mentioned to the African director of the Russian affairs, the gentleman, you know, who acts on behalf of the president of Russia in the African affairs. His name escapes me right now.

But – and he was the closest person who has gotten to Gadhafi from the international – you know, officials that are able to get that insider information. And so that was thrown to him as a way to add to the calculus of this whole thing, that Gadhafi in fact has only used his anti-tanks and his light machine guns and maybe the grads, but he has not used the very heavy missiles that he has, and he has Tripoli entrenched with them. And he is hinting to this suicidal idea that I’m capable of, you know, burning down the city.

[01:11:00]

But I think that also in itself reflects that psychology that’s known of Gadhafi, is that when he goes to those extremes, he is somebody that, you know, according to many people that know him closely – and Musa Kosa has said a few things about this – is that he is too coward. He is too cowardly. He will back off if he knows that his options are limited. But he will exert everything that he can to project himself as a desperate – you know, a nut case, basically.

And so I think – I think – you know, for those who are close to the Libyan issue, it is an indication of a dynamic change and it is an indication of the feeling that, you know – and this was mentioned in recent reports, the low morale in the Gadhafi loyalists, the fuel supply depletion, the cash depletion is in fact having its impact. But I think those are the real readings of the circumstances.

MS. OTTAWAY: (Inaudible, off mic.)

MR. LAMEN: No, I think – very quickly, I believe that these – all negotiations and stuff that he is sending and signals are – I think it’s just part of he’s trying to buy as much time as he – I always said that he is a master tactician but he is not a strategist.

And I think he survived for a long time. It may be, you know, tactics for a long-term tactics but I think he thinks that he can split the coalition against him. He can wait for the Libyan revolutionaries to – the opposition to crack and weaken, and I think he survived that way for a long time.

And I think him being out of the picture, all these people are talking on his behalf – I think just nobody talks on behalf of the maximum leader. And I think they know that. It’s him or nobody else.

[01:12:51]

And I think that’s – understanding him, that’s his mentality. He is not going to go anywhere without – and he’s not going to commit suicide, by the way. So I think these are – days and weeks, I don’t know about that. I will add a few more maybe month or two to what Ms. Clinton said.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK, before I open it again, let me take the prerogative of the chair and push you both on this a little more because what – particularly what Fadel just said – it seems to me that the implication is that there isn’t a negotiated solution, that there is only a military solution because if he is not going – he’s not negotiating now because he is not talking directly and nobody talks for him.
He is not going to commit suicide. I would assume that he is not going to allow himself to be arrested and sent to the ICC. I mean, that seems to me an extremely unlikely possibility. So then what – you know, what does a negotiated solution mean, being allowed to go into exile? I would like to hear a little more about that.

DR. OMIESH: I want to take a stab at this first. The stab I want to take is because reading the positions of the Libyan leadership and the opposition leadership and since the uprising, the one clear thing that I think has not changed, the one precondition if you may, is the exiting of Gadhafi and his family.

I think that’s the one thing that I have yet to see, you know, any change (in?). And I think if you ask most Libyans, if not the overwhelming majority, you know, that’s a given. But anything less which is – you know, one was mentioned as a safe exit, you know; one was mentioned as dealing with the issue of prosecution and the ICC; you know, one dealing with the presence in Libya under international supervision. I mean, so I think – I think of course you don’t negotiate with your friends. You negotiate with your enemies.

And I think it’s very hard for the Libyan people who have suffered for so many years against the brutal regime of Gadhafi and who have seen the atrocities of late that have essentially left no house in Libya without, you know – without a victim or without somebody who’s gravely affected to even accept a scenario that in any way, shape or form that does not punish Gadhafi for what he has done.

But I think the reality that is coming onto the ground that needs to be factored in with the leadership in the ground, the folks who are giving up their lives in order to affect reality, as well as those politicians who arguably can have a different ceiling from the ceiling of the revolutionaries and the ideologues, if you may – you know, they can sit in a room and negotiate these things – they have to be cognizant of the fact that you need something that allows for closure and the ability to move forward. And so, you know, it’s a painful process. It’s going to be very difficult.

But I think at the same time if you are unable to effect the definitive military solution on the ground and you’re looking at a potential massacre in Tripoli where thousands of lives can be – can be the result of a bloody, protracted conflict that, yes, will end up eliminating Gadhafi – but it’s not until that much happens – you know, I think that’s where the heaviness of that responsibility comes and the need for creativity.

I think Abdul Elah al-Khatib, you know, the gentleman who is the envoy from the U.N., I think he’s a capable individual. He’s very aware of the Arab reality, if you may, and he’s had, of course, very senior executive involvement in government and this and that. And he’s been struggling with that. That’s why he hasn’t come out. Of late he reported to the U.N. secretary-general that there is some, but he still did not call it negotiations. He is still saying that, we’re a little bit far from that. And that’s true.

And I think – I think we just need to prepare ourselves for these – (inaudible) – that when time comes, which it may as reality on the ground changes, we can at least have that as an available option. I think from a Libyan perspective, I think that needs to be faced, as difficult as it may be, as hard on the people to accept. But that’s what the politicians ought to be preparing themselves for, I think.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. OK, yes, you have been very patient. (Chuckles.)
Q: Clay Ramsay, Program on International Policy Attitudes. This is a question for Mr. Lamen. You were very definitive ruling out the tribalist paradigm for us in thinking about Libyan society. And I fully accept that. I’m utterly ignorant of what the texture of Libyan society may feel like, and I think that that’s how Westerners get attracted to ideas like tribalism is to try and fill in the void of their sense of what are relations like.

And in another connection you mentioned Norway. Now, Norway is a society that I know somewhat, and it has a – it’s one of those societies where there is an illusion that everyone sort of knows everyone through two or three or four connections, which isn’t exactly true and yet relationships feel that way.

And so if tribalism is out as sort of a mental shortcut for us, is it worthwhile to think of Libyan society that way, as a – as sort of, everyone vaguely knows everyone by reputation – you know what I mean?

[01:18:50]

MR. LAMEN: Absolutely. I think –

MS. OTTAWAY: Let me take another question. Yes?

Q: Thank you. My name is Chuck Dittrich from the U.S. Libya Business Association. I want to first of all thank our two speakers, and I guess I have a comment and a quick question.

The comment is, I mean, one of Gadhafi’s central tenets was to make sure that there was no independent civil society ever took root in Libya to the point where he made these statements against the establishment of Libyan NGOs.

And I think what we’ve seen very quickly is with the TNC is to show how civil society, how the Libyans themselves have managed to create their own civil society, their own version of it. And I think that’s a very promising development.

My question actually is for Dr. Ottaway. Given your experience of Afghanistan, Iraq and half of the other conflict areas of the world where you studied political transformation, I’d like to put you on the spot to either validate, give a reality check or offer any of your alternative scenarios on where you think Libya is going in transition.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you very much. (Laughter.)

MR. LAMEN: I’m listening to that one.

[01:20:15]

MS. OTTAWAY: OK. There was another question back there. Let me take the third. (Chuckles.)

MR. LAMEN: She just came back from the Middle East, so I think she is –

MS. OTTAWAY: Yeah, but not from Libya, not Libya.

Q: Steve Lande, Manchester Trade. A few of us have dealt with some of the businesspeople, many of them in your organization and so on, et cetera, in Libya. Are they being singled out? In general, I’m not trying to ask for specific names. Are they safe? Is there problems going on? I know there’s a lot more.
I know that Gadhafi has chosen the French as kind of his bête noir these days, but who knows where he is really coming from? But I’m just curious as to their own position. And will these people perhaps have a stronger position in case, depending on the outcome of the – depending on – well, I should put that within Mrs. Clinton’s prediction in the next – within weeks or days and so on than perhaps they’ve had now? Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK.

MR. LAMEN: All right. Let me start with the tribal thing, and I think that’s a good question. The question is about tribes. So there are no tribes; what is it? I think if I can remember right, I think over 70 percent of the Libyan populations are urban. They live in cities according to the CIA country book or world book. So here you go.

I think it’s they are urban and they live. They have – their last names can be of this area. Some of them, their last names more toward the cities that they come from more than that they are from the tribes. And I think – thank you for the other similarity to Norway. I was talking about the oil and small population.

But I think yeah, I think there is that kind of connection. If you talk to any Libyan within two or three degrees of separation, I think there will be. They all either know each other or they are related to each other. So there is that kind of connection. You can't sit in a meeting without asking somebody where is he from and where is your family.

Then you will know that, oh yeah, we are related, we are friends some, I know your dad. So that kind of connection I think is very, very important and I think it helps. Also it exposes the differences because I know your background, I know where you came from, I know your position on things, I’ve been following you. So it can create, you know, problems but not as much as it creates understanding and closeness. So in that sense I think it’s a good thing.

(Off-side conversation.)

MS. OTTAWAY: Yes, so that I don’t want to have the last word certainly. (Chuckles.) I certainly don’t know, you know, where it’s going. But let me just point to some of the things that I’m seeing in other transitions and some of the things that I have heard today that I think I would like to flag.

And let me start with the observation that I made at the very beginning in introduction when I said there are really two imperatives that Libya faces and that Egypt faces and Tunisia faced. But it’s more so in Libya because of the lack of functioning structures that will exist when – once the transition takes over.

And it is the imperative to move fast to put something in place so that the country does not descend into anarchy, but at the same time, the imperative to leave time enough to build some sort of a consensus, to give time to the, you know, political parties to develop institutions of civil society to develop and so on. And none of that happens overnight.

And from that point of view, starting with that assumption, what I heard today that Dr. Omiesh was talking about, I find the timetable for the transition that you presented somewhat frightening in the sense that I think it’s far, far too
short: In other words, it is – that is a timetable that tries to answer one imperative; that is, that of trying to put something in place quickly, but not the second one that is, how do we – how can the transition – you know, how in putting in place this new institution and new constitution and so on, how can a consensus be built around them?

And in that sense I think I agree with what Fadel said, that maybe Libya needs to think about a two-step transition, a two-step constitution, a preliminary period of – you know, there has to be a government of some sort obviously and there have been some rules that concern this government.

[01:25:22]

But the constitutions that last in the world are the ones that are the result of a process of negotiations. I mean, we think too much of constitutions as being sacred documents. I think a constitution is a political agreement after all. It’s a political agreement that says we’ve compromised this is the way we are going to do things.

You know, the American Constitution, as everybody knows, was the result of a political compromise essentially. And all the constitutions that last are the result of a political compromise. The problem is that we all know political compromise takes time.

And I think in that sense I have been struck by some of the transitions perhaps as being more relevant in Europe after World War II where countries faced the same problems of being extremely divided and extremely fragile. And you had in several countries: You had it in Italy; you had it in France, the setting up of a government of national reconciliation with as many people as possible and taking time before you really come to a constitutional document and to elections because elections have a way of becoming too definitive in many ways. And we have seen a lot of premature elections in other transitions.

So you know, without trying to predict what is going to happen, I think just listening to – you know, my reply to you would be slow down a bit because this really cannot work, cannot work so fast. So you know, that’s as good as I can give – an answer as I can give you. Fadel?

MR. LAMEN: I think you’re right. I completely agree with you and I think it will take time. I think a two-step solution will be – I think the TNC have not even prepared the people to accept the reconciliation.

The emotions are so high and I think if the TNC will take a decision to negotiate with this or come up with a decision with this and sit down with this, and I think it will be rejected by most of the people who feel like there is no way.

[01:27:45]

And I think – so having time to have all these things developed – and I think it’s a good time. It’s very important and it’s needed before you can commit to something that’s last and permanent.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK. I have seen a few more hands going up. So let me take a final round. David Mack, and you and you.

Q: Fadel, a question for you. I’m David Mack from the Middle East Institute.

MR. LAMEN: I know who you are. How are you?
Q: When you spoke about the contributions the international community could make, you said the first priority would be maintaining security.

MR. LAMEN: Right.

Q: And you know, obviously as we know from other situations, even with the most harmonious nations where everybody’s a brother and so on and no ethnic divisions and no sectarian divisions, inevitably there’s prospect without government of looting, retribution, competition among armed groups. Were you suggesting that there’s a need for some kind of an international peacekeeping force?

MR. LAMEN: Absolutely, and I think since this conflict started, I predicted three things would happen – will be a no-fly zone, will be targeting Gadhafi’s strategic assets and there will be a Muslim and Arab force that will come on the ground, and to help. And I think it can come under the blue helmets, it can come under whatever – now NATO can channel that through Turkey. Turkey came on board now and they recognize the TNC. They are buddies now. They’re happy I think after a while. For a while they were not. They were weighing their own issues.

[01:29:33]

And I think NATO and the United Nations, they can come together, and we need a force on the ground that has the experience under the United Nations to do that. There is no doubt about it.

MS. OTTAWAY: Thank you. Let me take very quickly these two. Keep your questions very short and then we’ll have a final –

Q: Kirtek al-Awani (ph) from International Relief & Development. I just wanted to know what you thought about the role of international NGOs in the transition process in Libya in terms of – I understand that you don’t want to come out as, like, offensive or anything but more workers in a partnership. So how can they be effective? Thank you.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK.

MR. LAMEN: Do you want to take the other question?

MS. OTTAWAY: OK.

Q: Sam Lasno (ph), also from the Middle East Institute. So under Gadhafi, Libya obviously had a very troubled, very isolated international position. Eventually where do you see the new Libya positioning itself regionally and internationally?

[01:30:34]

MR. LAMEN: You take the NGO, I’ll take –

DR. OMIESH: OK, I’ll take the NGO part. No, I mean, I think, you know, if we can have all the international NGOs that come to Libya, we would welcome it. I think what’s important is to create enough know-how so that when you engage that process, there’s not too many things to learn on the ground. I think it’s important to build a bridge of trust with the folks.
And I think you’ll find, you know, the Libyan community to be very welcoming. There’s a huge thirst for that type of, you know, help. And at the same time if you can recruit Libyan-Americans to be members of your teams, I think it would help very much to have them create that linkage, you know, that can help facilitate.

But by all means, I think in all respects of civic life, if you may, I think that’s one place where there is so much need that I think we will find it not only gratifying but certainly very much a need for us to be there. So I hope yours and everybody else’s are ready to chip in a hand to help out.

MR. LAMEN: As far as where Libya will be, we are looking for Libya to be a very effective, positive member of the international community. And I think the Libyan people are by nature and I think by position, by history, they are part of the Mediterranean region. I think there is a lot of connection to Europe.

There is a lot of connection to the North Africa west of Libya and also a sort of connection to Egypt and the other region. And I think some of even the old tribal tradition – old tribal tradition – people, there are still some affinity even with the Gulf people, and with the tribes in the Gulf.

But also it has a very interesting connection to Africa. And, again, Gadhafi, for better or worse, he built a very strong network, a Libyan network in Africa. And it can be very useful. And I think Libya can position itself to play a gate – as a gate to Africa, as an effective country, barring a lot of Libyan – muddling in Libyan business by countries like Algeria, I think which is itself going through transition, or the last of their old guards – (inaudible).

So hopefully within a few years, Algeria will be an effective and positive country. I think if the local countries in the region are not trying to negatively influence Libya, I think it will be a positive impact on the region.

MS. OTTAWAY: OK, thank you very much. I think we have run out of time. Before we thank the speakers, I think we should also wish them that the next time we get together, it would be to discuss a transition that’s ongoing rather than how the transition might – (applause).

(END)