Building Libya's Security Sector

FREDERIC WEHREY AND PETER COLE

SUMMARY

Libya's security situation is worsening. The central government is struggling, despite new integration initiatives, to control the country's numerous armed groups, whose accumulated size and firepower vastly exceed those of the regular army and police. Both the government and these groups have created numerous hybrid security entities—the two largest being the Supreme Security Committees (SSC) and the Libya Shield Force—which have unclear lines of authority, tenuous loyalty to the center, and a tendency toward infighting. To achieve lasting peace and stabilize the democratic transition, the Libyan government, with international support, must build an accountable, inclusive security sector.

Recommendations

- Push for political reconciliation through a broad-based national dialogue that includes all Libyan factions and regions and sets clear written goals for unifying the security sector.

- Build an effective security sector architecture with a U.S. National Security Council–type body to coordinate disparate security efforts.

  ○ Streamline the ambiguous functions and command authority of the Ministry of Defense, chief of general staff, and military governorships.

- Rebalance the military's personnel system by implementing a retirement plan to gradually downsize the bloated senior officer cadre and developing company-grade and senior noncommissioned officer ranks.

- Raise regular army and police salaries to meet or exceed those of the SSC and the Libya Shield.

- Build the National Guard as an inclusive, volunteer force that integrates individual SSC and Libya Shield elements for a two-year period.

  ○ Clarify its mission and lines of authority, diversify its recruitment, and de-conflict its responsibilities with those of the regular army.

  ○ Transfer most of its functions to the army and make it a reserve force after the transition period.

- Bolster U.S. and international training of Libyan military and police forces.

  ○ Vet recruits carefully, emphasize human rights training, and insist on parallel tracks of institutional reform and political dialogue.

  ○ Refrain from basing troops or establishing a military presence on Libyan soil.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Frederic Wehrey *is a senior associate in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is the author of "The Struggle for Security in Eastern Libya" and a co-editor of* Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara. *A former U.S. military attaché in Tripoli, he has interviewed Libyan political figures, civil society activists, tribal leaders, and revolutionary fighters. His commentary has appeared in the* New York Times, *the* Washington Post, *the* Financial Times, *and* Foreign Affairs.

Peter Cole *was the senior analyst on Libya with the International Crisis Group from July 2011 to July 2012, where he was the primary author of two reports:* Holding Libya Together: Security Challenges After Qadhafi *and* Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts. *He authored a Carnegie paper on border issues in Libya, "Borderline Chaos? Stabilizing Libya's Periphery," and recently completed a consultancy with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.*

More than two years after the Libyan revolution, the country is beset by a dizzying array of afflictions. A weak central government struggles to assert its authority. The restive eastern region has witnessed a worsening spiral of violence. Porous and ill-policed borders enable arms smuggling, illicit trafficking, and the movement of armed militants across Africa and the Middle East. The list goes on and on.

Behind all this, Libya struggles with security malaise. It is typically attributed to the power and autonomy of the country's revolutionary armed groups (known in local parlance, depending on their size, as "battalions," "brigades," and "companies") and the corresponding weakness of the official army and regular police. But this explanation ignores the fact that the problems with Libya's security sector are fundamentally political and must be addressed by a parallel track of national dialogue and inclusiveness rather than by the central government trying to quickly monopolize the use of force.

The Libyan government needs to build an accountable and inclusive security sector. The path it chooses will to a large extent determine whether its political future trends toward fragmentation and strife, praetorianism and authoritarian rule, or a healthy civil-military balance that facilitates a democratic transition. Much of the burden of building a robust security sector must be borne by the Libyan government, but there is still much that Libya's international friends—whether the United States, Europe, or countries in the Arab world—can do to support its efforts.

THE HYBRID AND FRAGMENTED SECURITY SECTOR

The Libyan security system is in a state of disarray. The postrevolutionary central government has attempted with little success to establish a degree of control over and to organize the country's numerous revolutionary armed groups. The result of this halting effort has been the formation of new, hybrid security entities marked by a combination of official and nonofficial actors, unclear lines of authority, and tenuous allegiance to the central government. The effectiveness and sustainability of this hybrid security arrangement is complicated by muddled chains of command, personal rivalries, redundant missions, and bureaucratic competition over resources.

The large majority of the armed groups have been incorporated into two umbrella coalitions, the Supreme Security Committees (SSC) and the Libya Shield (which were established as transitional gendarmeries), that are nominally paid for and under the authority of the Interior Ministry and the chief of staff, respectively. A significant minority of the groups have become part of the Preventive Security Apparatus, a counterintelligence force under the chief of staff or the border guard (including a suborganization in charge of guarding vital installations).

In theory, these units, particularly the SSC and the Libya Shield, are supposed to augment the regular army and police. In reality, however, they act with a high degree of autonomy. Some pursue agendas that are ideological and political; others have outlooks that are local, individualistic, and occasionally criminal. This dynamic was most evident in the May 2013 siege of government ministries by elements of the

SSC and the Libya Shield because, unusually, this event involved a number of different security entities and regional brigades collaborating for a common political goal. They first demanded the passage of the so-called political isolation law, a sweeping measure that would ban officials from the era of overthrown leader Muammar Qaddafi from government employment and, shortly thereafter, called for the resignation of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan.

The Ministry of Interior has undertaken a plan to vet and transfer SSC members into the police. The SSC was meant to have been dissolved by now, but progress has been uneven depending on locale. In Tripoli, for example, some branches of the SSC oppose integration; others continue to clash with the police and other armed groups from the western mountains. Much of the transitional program's difficulties can be attributed to a lack of competitive police salaries; lingering distrust of the Ministry of Interior; apparent differences over the future of the SSC's intelligence, counternarcotics, and prison programs; and the absence of a broader dialogue process.

The Warriors Affairs Commission was a promising integration effort set up under the administration of Abdel Rahim al-Keeb, who was interim prime minister of Libya's transitional government. The commission aimed at registering and gauging the intentions and aspirations of brigade fighters. It received limited cooperation, particularly from Misrata- and Tripoli-based groups and from the Ministries of Interior and Defense.

Recently, Zeidan's office conceived of the National Guard as a way of bringing Libya Shield members under more explicit state control. Envisioned as a 35,000-strong volunteer force that would take over a number of internal policing functions, the force was configured to be a two-year project that would entail moving recruits who so wished into the regular armed forces while providing employment to those who did not. At the end of the two-year period, the remaining National Guard would revert to a reserve force. But those members of armed groups who desire security careers seem to prefer waiting for political and security sector reform to joining a vague third entity like the National Guard. Because the National Guard plan does not explicitly address these political concerns and seems to have been drawn up without broad consultation, the country's elected parliament, the General National Congress (GNC), has repeatedly opposed or queried the plan.

Part of the reason the armed groups have so much power and the security sector is so muddled is the decrepit state of the regular security forces. Neglected under Qaddafi, who feared their potential for coups, the Libyan armed forces remain extremely ill equipped, poorly trained, and bloated at the senior ranks. In some parts of the country, the army does not control its own facilities. There is little internal coordination between component battalions, and local efforts to recruit and train forces are patchy and inconsistent. In addition, the armed forces frequently have hostile relations with the Libya Shield and other paramilitaries. The police force fares a little better but is unequipped to handle more difficult and hazardous policing tasks (such as counternarcotics efforts).

Both the armed forces and the police have taken a backseat to the Libya Shield, the SSC, and several other paramilitaries—an

ironic mirror of the arrangement that existed in the twilight years of Qaddafi's rule. Then, the army and police had ceded control of operational tasks to, respectively, the security battalions commanded by Qaddafi's sons and the internal security service that answered directly to Qaddafi's office.

Beyond the confusing web of force structures, Libya's security establishment suffers from dire administrative deficiencies. Under Qaddafi, the Ministry of Defense and the chief of staff's office did not have an institutional base and staffing functions. Because of the lack of such a framework, the functioning of these institutions is now highly dependent on personality politics and backdoor deal making with the various armed groups. There is no system for rationalizing procurement, force development, training, and deployment.

Without a clear strategic direction and transparency in resource allocation, the country's revolutionaries have come to suspect that the defense sector and the Interior Ministry—if not other branches of government, such as the Justice Ministry—are perpetuating the interests of those who served Qaddafi's regime. The leaders of revolutionary brigades who wish to shape the future of the defense, police, or intelligence sectors believe that the top-heavy ranks of the army leave little room for them to assume positions of authority. They are loathe to surrender their leverage when the country's key political processes and institutions (the constitution and parliament) are either not yet clearly defined or are dysfunctional, delayed, or paralyzed by gridlock. For their part, the senior officers of the army have resisted the integration of the revolutionaries, whom they regard as either excessively politicized, Islamist, or ill-disciplined rabble.

Against this backdrop, the international community is attempting to train Libyan soldiers. Several North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries have signed on to train a new "general purpose" military force that is to have roughly 19,500 members. The United States has committed to training 5,000 to 8,000 Libyan soldiers under the supervision of its Africa Command. Yet, there remain serious concerns within the U.S. government about the specific roles of the general purpose force, its oversight and command authorities, its relationship with other security bodies, and, perhaps most importantly, the degree of buy-in from Libya's armed groups and political factions. In addition, the United States may also train two company-sized Libyan special forces units.

All of this amounts to a chaotic Libyan security sector that is in desperate need of reform if the state is to be stabilized and the democratic transition is to take root.

A NEW APPROACH

To move forward, the Libyan government must train, equip, and reform the state's security institutions, overcoming the perception of their association with the former regime. And it must demobilize and disarm those elements that cannot be integrated into a unified whole without polarizing the already-fragmented security sector. For Libya to achieve lasting peace, these twin tracks must move in concert rather than working against each other in a zero-sum fashion.

To date, the international community in postrevolutionary Libya has followed a philosophy of allowing Libyans to lead and shape their country's future, assisting only when asked by the recognized political

authority. For this reason, the Libyan government must lead the way forward. At the same time, the number of international and national entities proposing to support Libyan security sector reform is increasing, and some of their mandates and support functions are still being decided. Now more than ever, a coordinated approach among all actors involved in building Libya's security sector is required.

Implement a national dialogue program that sets out clear written goals related to the unification of the defense and security sector. This much-needed program should produce an agreement on the commitment to reform and unify the Libyan army as well as the interior and intelligence sectors. It should include a transparent and open review of service records of those who served the Qaddafi regime during the 2011 revolution and, if possible, identify a clear "road map" for dissolving temporary armed formations. Countries with similar experiences—such as South Africa—and international bodies such as the United Nations Support Mission in Libya could be consulted for advice and support.

BUILD AN EFFECTIVE SECURITY SECTOR ARCHITECTURE

Finalize a defense white paper that sets up a national security architecture, focusing specifically on a U.S. National Security Council–type body that will coordinate disparate efforts. This formative document is essential for defining the authorities and lines of responsibility between ministries and the security sector. Currently, individual ministries and security institutions each pursue their own programs for force development, training, procurement, and integration of armed groups. Even within a single ministry, there is competition and overlap between different directorates. A body similar to the U.S. National Security Council that includes planning, liaison, and coordination functions would do much to remedy this deficiency.

Streamline ambiguous functions and command authority held by the Ministry of Defense, chief of general staff, and military governorships. There remains great confusion as to which of these entities holds what authority and powers. These distinctions must be clearly legislated.

Dismantle the Preventive Security Apparatus and holdout elements of the SSC and transfer their functions to the police and intelligence services. The Preventive Security Apparatus is a vestige of the revolutionary era that duplicates functions that should normally be performed by the police and intelligence services. It should be dismantled, and selected members of the body should be transferred to the police and intelligence forces after thorough vetting. Similarly, the SSC structure has outlived its usefulness and should be dismantled.

REBALANCE THE MILITARY'S PERSONNEL SYSTEM AND RATIONALIZE PAYROLL

Revitalize and fund the Warriors Affairs Commission within a new, politically inclusive body that supports security sector reform efforts with accurate data. The Warriors Affairs Commission was the most robust data-gathering effort initiated in postrevolutionary Libya. Crucially, the information collected on the intentions of brigade fighters could be shared with Libyan leaders and international partners

to inform and support policymaking. A new or revitalized Warriors Affairs Commission is badly needed and should ideally be linked explicitly to payroll registration and the receipt of salary to help prevent brigades from opting out, as they have in the past.

Most Libyans serving in irregular brigades today either do not want or lack the discipline for careers in the army or in policy. Their aspirations and intentions will likely change with time. Only with regular and comprehensive research into this area can more specific measures such as vocational training programs be considered; eventually, these should be supported.

Implement a retirement plan to gradually downsize the military's bloated senior ranks while focusing on developing company-grade and senior noncommissioned officer ranks. There are simply too many generals and colonels, and not enough captains, lieutenants, and senior noncommissioned officers in the Libyan armed forces. The focus should be on freeing up senior-level billets to facilitate promotion up the ranks and to attract senior commanders from revolutionary groups.

Halt efforts to purge the armed forces of seasoned Qaddafi-era officers. The Military Integrity and Libyan Army Reform Commission headed by the Office of the Chief of Staff represents a severe and sweeping operation to rid the Libyan armed forces of officers suspected of supporting the Qaddafi regime's military efforts during the 2011 conflict. It effectively removes officers above the rank of colonel and, in so doing, deprives the army of much-needed expertise. In addition, the purge could have a number of unforeseen social consequences. Senior officers in the army hail from prominent tribes, and the ripple effects of their summary dismissals could destabilize the country. The political concerns that led to the commission's formation should be addressed within the framework of a national dialogue.

Reform and reorganize payroll administration in the defense sector. Brigade members have largely been paid by check made out to the head of their outfit. To date, many fighters complain of late payments; others have registered two or three times with other security entities. The true size of the integration or demobilization task ahead of the defense sector cannot be accurately ascertained until payroll reform is implemented.

Raise the salaries of the regular army and police to meet or exceed those of the SSC and the Libya Shield. This step is crucial to attracting young men currently serving in the revolutionary armed groups. In the case of the SSC, salaries are double those paid to regular police. Until the salary issue is resolved, Ministry of Interior efforts to dismantle the SSC will continue to be stymied. Similarly, the pay scale of the Libyan army pales in comparison to that of the Libya Shield, making it difficult to attract high-quality recruits.

BUILD THE NATIONAL GUARD AS AN INCLUSIVE TRANSITION FORCE

Implement the National Guard program. Under current circumstances, the National Guard represents the most viable option for gradually bringing revolutionary armed groups into the formal defense institutions, but it must be accompanied by a broad-based national dialogue and efforts to build the regular army.

Clarify the National Guard's role and lines of authority, diversify its recruitment, and de-conflict its responsibilities with those of the regular army. The National Guard's mission, chain of command, and composition were never fully defined, making it a source of heated political debate. Different versions of the plan for the National Guard envisioned the force fulfilling different roles—from policing strategic facilities to assuming broader, more gendarmerie-like responsibilities over border control and internal policing. The most recent plan has the National Guard answering to the prime minister's office, while revolutionaries wish to see it under the control of the GNC during the transition period and then under the Ministry of Defense. To attract the revolutionaries' support, these issues must be clarified, with particular attention to civilian oversight by the GNC. To successfully unite the fractured security sector, recruitment needs to be diversified to ensure that the National Guard is composed of both professional military officers and revolutionary fighters, regardless of their formal military backgrounds.

Create a security sector road map alongside the legislation forming the National Guard that will elicit support from the GNC, the regular army, and the Libya Shield. Some Libya Shield commanders are proposing their own alternatives to the National Guard, and at the time of this writing, the GNC had rejected a draft law to govern the force. The plan is also opposed by officers of the regular army—including the present acting chief of general staff—who see it as a competitor of the army. Many are concerned that the National Guard is simply a way to avoid addressing the more pressing issue of army reform—downsizing the army's bloated senior ranks, applying the political isolation law to the armed forces, and impartially investigating the records of those who served in the military during the 2011 conflict.

These concerns can only be addressed in the context of a road map that clearly shows how the formation and ultimate fate of the National Guard is connected to the broader issues of security sector reform and transitional justice—perhaps within the context of a national dialogue. To ensure buy-in, the National Guard's roles and responsibilities must be clarified in tandem with those of the police, the border guard, and the regular army, to avoid the creation of a "parallel army."

BOLSTER INTERNATIONAL TRAINING OF LIBYAN SECURITY FORCES

Implement a Ministry of Defense advisory effort. The United States in particular can do more to embed advisers into Libya's Ministry of Defense and Office of the Chief of Staff that can mentor and consult with Libyan personnel. Priority areas include key staffing functions that were largely neglected by Qaddafi, such as budget, planning, and recruitment.

A potential vehicle for this is the Defense Institution Reform Initiative, a U.S. Department of Defense program designed to help partner countries build accountable and transparent defense establishments. A nascent program under this initiative was active in Libya but was put on hold after the September 2011 attack on the U.S. diplomatic mission in the eastern city of Benghazi. The program should be restarted and augmented by the Ministry of Defense Advisers Program—a separate initiative that was applied in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Assist in training the Libyan military, but insist on careful vetting of recruits, human rights training, parallel tracks of institutional reform, demobilization of the armed groups, and political dialogue. Due to the dearth of junior and midlevel officers and senior noncommissioned officers in the Libyan armed forces, as part of its training efforts, the United States will have to prioritize identifying individuals with the aptitude and leadership potential to undergo rapid officer training—and by necessity, some of these individuals should be drawn from the revolutionary armed groups. The United States will also need to insist on clear lines of command and civilian oversight mechanisms to ensure the force does not become dominated by a particular political faction or individual.

Implement fully mixed battalions with a national esprit de corps. The regular army, Libya Shield, SSC, and border guard all suffer from insufficiently mixed forces. Too many army battalions are supplied by youth from one particular region, diminishing the appeal of the army as an inclusive, truly national force. In the Libya Shield, recruitment of whole battalions rather than individuals has fostered internal schism and competition, hindered transparency, and weakened internal command and control.

A centrally coordinated and strategic plan, directed by the chief of staff, should mix new recruits and participants in international training programs with the goal of tempering allegiances to tribe, region, or political faction. The lessons of army formation in states emerging from internecine strife—such as Lebanon—should be carefully considered.

Refrain from basing any troops or establishing any military presence on Libyan soil. The training and mentoring of Libyan forces should be done by foreign forces and contractors outside of Libya.

Increase the staffing of the Office of Security Cooperation at the U.S. embassy. U.S. vetting and coordination of training should be run from this office to avoid increasing the size of the U.S. footprint in Libya. This is not simply a matter of force protection but is necessary to avoid feeding widespread rumors in the country that the United States is seeking to use Libya as a platform for counterterrorism operations in North Africa.

Bolster International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs in Libya. IMET is a valuable tool for building the capacity of Libya's mid- and senior-level officer corps. The programs should be expanded to account for the need to train a new generation of Libyan commanders. The priority should be on areas that were long neglected under Qaddafi: strategic planning, doctrine, civil-military relations, and basic staff functions.

A PEACEFUL, DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

Although dire, Libya's security deterioration is not irreversible. For the country to move forward in its democratic transition, it needs to build inclusive, accountable, and transparent security institutions.

Doing so requires an accurate understanding of the political roots of its security problems and an effective road map for regularizing and formalizing the country's highly fragmented security sector. It is a task that must ultimately be undertaken by Libyans themselves but one that the international community can and should do more to assist.