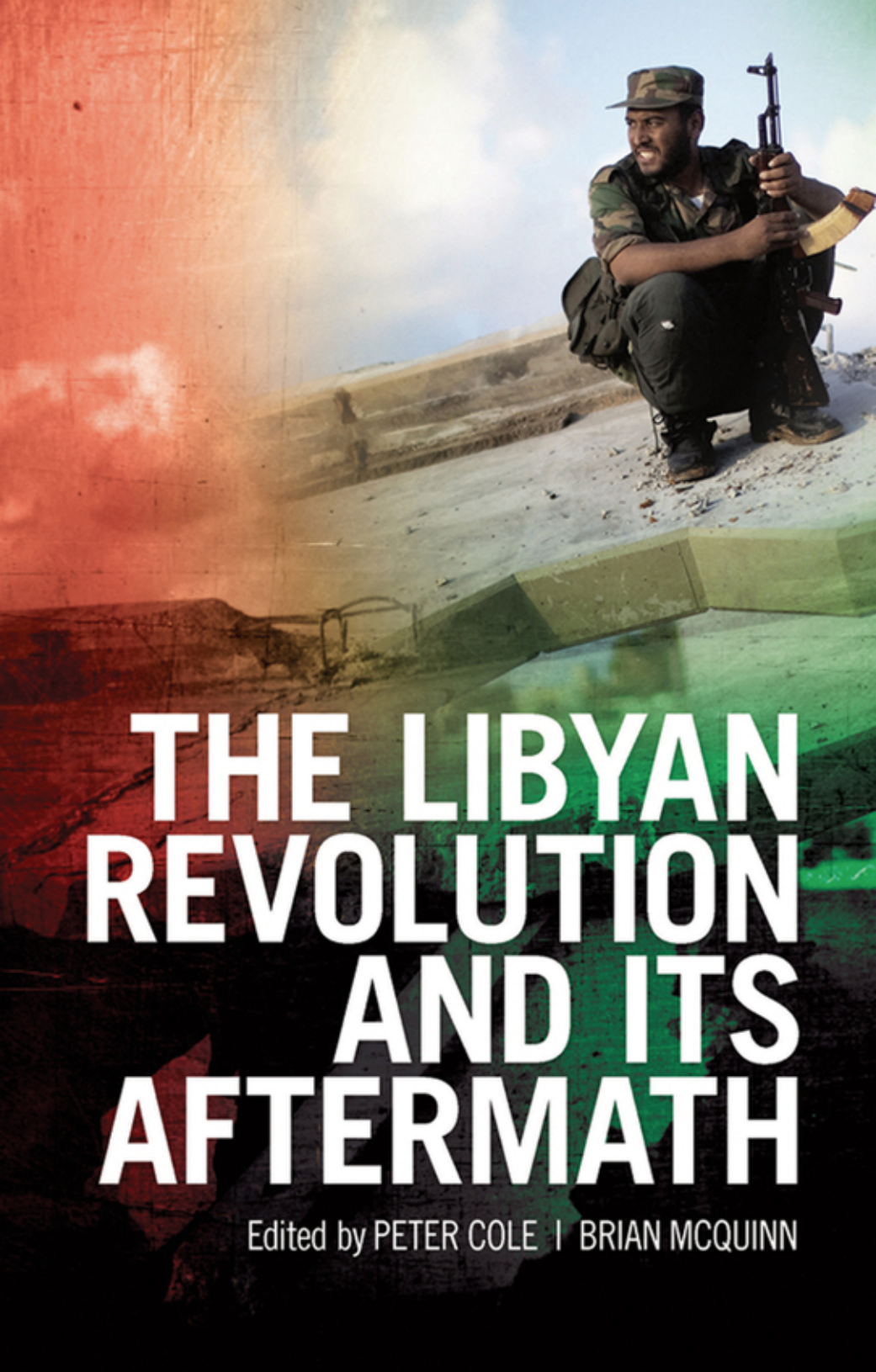

THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

Edited by PETER COLE | BRIAN MCQUINN

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This volume employs the transliteration system used by the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) (available online at: http://ijmes.ws.gc.cuny.edu/authorresources/#transliteration).

Some simplifications have been made to promote readability and a clean text. Long vowels—*alif*, *yaa'*, and *waw* (و ي ا) are rendered with 'a', 'i' or 'u', and not with the macron as in IJMES. Thus قذافي is rendered 'Qadhafi'. Similarly the consonants *saad* and *taal* (ط ص) are rendered as 's' and 't' respectively; *daad* (ض) as 'd', and *dhaal* (ظ) as dh without macron. The *yaa* preceded by a *hamza* ـئي is transliterated 'ai': thus شيخ is rendered *shaikh*, not *sheikh*. *Ain* ع and *hamza* أ are transliterated with', but dropped entirely when appearing as the first letter. Thus أوباري is Awbari, not 'Awbari. Letters with the *shadda* are doubled; thus بلحاج is 'Bilhajj', not 'Bilhaj' or 'Belhaj'.

The definite article ال is transliterated lower case 'al', and attached to the word it governs by hyphen ('Saif al-Islam'). For readability, 'moon' letters, (which elide the *lam* with the first consonant of the next word), are not rendered; thus الشمس ('the sun') is written *al-shams*, not *ash-shams*; the name عبد الرحمان is written Abd al-Rahman, not Abd ar-Rahman.

Names are written in full on first usage (Abd al-Fattah Yunis) and subsequently with reference to their last name ('Yunis'). For last names employing 'al-', the name is spelt in full on first usage (Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi) but references to the last name drop the 'al' ('Qadhafi'). The definite article is also dropped for place names; al-Iraq is rendered 'Iraq', al-Khums as 'Khums'. Names employing 'Abd al-', however, always include that phrase for religious reasons. Thus مصطفى عبد الجليل

is rendered Mustafa Abd al-Jalil and subsequently 'Abd al-Jalil'. The name عبد الله is written as Abdullah, not Abdallah or Abd Allah.

Libyan Dialects and Other Exceptions

The standard IJMES 'exceptions' list is used for Arabic names in English that when rendered formally would be hard to recognise; for example, جمال عبد الناصر is written Gamal Abdel Nasser, not Jamal Abd al-Nasir. For similar reasons, بنغازي is written 'Benghazi' not 'Binghazi'. Place names that are completely different in English and Arabic use the English variant; طرابلس is written Tripoli, not 'Tarablus', القاهرة Cairo, not 'al-Qahira', and ليبيا 'Libya', not 'Libia'.

Libyan dialects sometimes elide the first two consonants or radicals in a word, and occasionally transliteration reflects this. For example, we have chosen to render أبو سليم as Abu Slim, not Abu Salim. Likewise some Libyan dialects elide the initial *mim* م in a word with the following radical, particularly in names, and sometimes render this with an initial *alef*, reflected here with an initial 'I'. Thus امحمّد is transliterated 'Imhammad', امضخم is Imdakhum and محمد مغريف, is rendered Imhammad Imgharyif.

Tuareg and non-Arabised Tebu and Amazigh names, reflecting both a different language and sometimes the French phonetic system, have been transliterated according to authors' own systems.

Frequently Used Terminology[1]

Revolution/Civil War

The book adopts the term 'revolution' to refer to the events of 15 February 2011–23 October 2011 in Libya, which Libyans named the '17 February Revolution'. This recognises that these events ended not only Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's rule, but his conception of Libya as a decentralised 'state of the masses' (*jamahiriyya*) and the institutions he invented to administer and enforce that order, such as the General People's Congress, Revolutionary Committees, Popular Social Leadership Committees, and many others. It also follows the definition of 'revolution' employed by historian Charles Tilly.[2] Some contributors employ the term 'civil war' to describe the fighting that took place over this period; here, the formulation devised by Kalyvas[3] of 'armed combat within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between

parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities' is understood. Furthermore, the minimum threshold of violence for civil wars devised by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, which describes conflicts with 25 battle deaths per year as 'civil conflicts' and those with 1000 battle deaths per year as 'civil wars', applies to the Libyan conflict.[4]

Regime/Government. The term 'government' in this volume refers to official organs of the Libyan state, including its ministries and office of the prime minister, judiciary, and armed forces. Qadhafi's philosophy of government included successive attempts to dismantle this state. In the process, he created a large, finely-tuned system of non-governmental 'revolutionary', tribal or security institutions, headed by loyal individuals who were often rotated between posts. The word 'regime' applies to this system. Examples of 'regime' bodies found in this volume include the Revolutionary Committees and their Revolutionary Guard, People's Social Leadership Committees, the Central Intelligence Bureau and its subsidiary internal and external security apparatus (al-Amn al-Dakihli/*al-Khariji*), and the security brigades (see below). While the 'regime' was swept away by the 17 February Revolution, the National Transitional Council (NTC) turned to the remains of the government for governance and security during the transition. The phrases 'interim government' and 'transitional government' apply to the post-revolutionary administrations of Abd al-Rahim al-Kib (24 November 2011–14 November 2012) and Ali Zaidan (14 November 2012–11 March 2014).

Katiba/'Revolutionary battalion'. Revolutionary fighters adopted military terminology to describe their armed groups; the most commonly used term was *katiba*, (pl. *kata'ib*). An army *katiba* denotes a force of anything from several hundred to around a thousand soldiers; in the Libyan army, it denoted a unit headed by a colonel.[5] In that sense, this volume uses 'battalion' as a more appropriate translation for *katiba* than the oft-used 'brigade', which denotes a far larger force. It differentiates revolutionary forces as 'revolutionary battalions' as opposed to Qadhafi's 'security brigades'. Nonetheless, 'revolutionary battalions' were often far smaller and less organised than their military equivalents; the term *katiba* became used to describe any group regardless of size.

Security brigades. Qadhafi's military-security apparatus employed a variety of 'security brigades' that worked in parallel to the armed forces. The former were recruited explicitly tribally and represented on the

'permanent security committee' which was based in Qadhafi's headquarters in Bab al-Aziziyya alongside other state security organs; the internal security (*al-Amn al-Dakhili*), and strategic installations security bodies. Two of the most prominent—the 32 Reinforced Brigade and the Imhammad Imgharyif Brigade—were considered 'rapid intervention forces'. Other brigades that are prominent actors in this volume are the Fadil, Faris, Sahban, Hamza and Maghawir Brigades. 'Security brigades' possessed lines of command and communication to the armed forces and its chief of staff, from which they recruited, but unlike the armed forces, were sworn to protect Qadhafi's regime and revolution rather than the Libyan state. Two other forces—the People's Guard and People's Resistance Forces—were comprised of reservists and volunteers from loyal tribes mobilised to fight alongside the security brigades. While the armed forces persisted beyond the revolution, the 'security brigades' did not. (Another key actor in this volume, the *Sa'iqa* Special Forces Battalion, was part of the regular armed forces.)

LIST OF ACRONYMS

GNC	General National Congress, Libya's interim government elected 7 July 2012.
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (now defunct).
LYD	Libyan Dinars
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NFSL	National Front for the Salvation of Libya (now defunct)
NTC	National Transitional Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya
US	United States (of America)

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Rebecca Murray writes regularly from the Middle East and Africa for publications like Al Jazeera English and Inter Press Service. Murray was based in Libya in 2012, and returned in the Spring of 2013, visiting the country's south Sahara desert several times. There she talked to Libya's Tebu community about their history, their integral role in the 2011 revolution, and their place in the country's future.

Dirk Vandewalle teaches at Dartmouth College. He is the author of *Libya Since Independence* and *A History of Modern Libya* and is currently the field office director for the Carter Center in Tripoli.

Vandewalle has been one of the only western academics to have worked consistently in Libya during the Qadhafi period and is currently working on a new book, *Libya: The Uncertain Revolution*.

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INTRODUCTION

Peter Cole and *Brian McQuinn*

The essays in this volume provide a granular account of the period beginning in Benghazi, Libya on 15 February 2011, when protests over the arrest of Fathi Tirbil, a legal advocate for families of victims of the 1996 Abu Slim prison massacre, precipitated what is now called the '17 February Revolution'. Focusing primarily on the military conflict spanning 15 February–23 October 2011, and the first year of the transition that followed, its chapters recount events from the perspective of its key geographic, tribal/communal and political players, networks and constituencies. The chapters in this volume argue, as a whole, that these communities' narratives are stronger, more distinct and self-contained than one single 'Libyan' narrative. Yet those narrative strands, read together, weave into a single thread that, while discordant, is uniquely 'Libyan'.

The volume was conceived through a series of conversations among field practitioners in Libya to address many of the myths and analytic shorthands that had become commonplace concerning both the Libyan revolution and its aftermath, and the international intervention that accompanied it. The editors sought contributors with deep relationships to the communities they studied, based on at least three months' field experience in Libya. Some conducted specific research for this volume, drawing on interviews with senior fighters, politicians and civil society leaders. Each followed their own methodology. Three

chapters—those covering the National Transitional Council (NTC), UN, and transitional justice sector—were penned by senior diplomatic officials. Two, covering Islamist networks and the Tebu, were contributed by journalists. The remaining chapters employ varying methodologies drawn from political science and anthropology.

Taken together, the chapters illustrate how, firstly, Libya's revolution, and the intervention, not only toppled Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, but removed key decision makers and ended Libya's modality of government—Qadhafi's 'state of the masses'—creating profound issues surrounding national identity. Consequently, the multiple military and political actors that arose to fight or support Qadhafi acted on parochial logics and historical narratives, which determined their desire to co-opt, support or oppose the transitional authorities or Qadhafi's state. The result was a revolution disconnected beyond the shared goal of Qadhafi's defeat, resulting in unique political and military structures and relationships in every major city and sub-region. Accordingly, the chapters in the first part of this volume discuss Libyan transitional authorities' attempts to direct the revolution and transition, and the resultant political discord, while the second part focuses individually on the major geographic, tribal and political networks that emerged to shape events.

The volume also discusses the policy implications faced by the international intervention; the military intervention, framed by United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCR) 1970 and 1973, and enforced primarily through NATO air power, and the political and civilian support requested by the NTC and transitional authorities in the form of a UN mission and multiple forms of bilateral assistance. It demonstrates how both political and military planners were influenced by the desire to maintain an international 'light footprint', to cede ultimate decisions on national self-determination to Libyan authority, and to avoid mistakes made with the rapid dissolution of the Iraqi state in 2003–4. Yet the Libyan political divides discussed above presented no institutional or charismatic authority, but rather a rump state, surrounded by sub-national identities and communities older than itself. The ensuing debates and power struggles over who had the authority to take decisions provoked discord and drift. Policies and plans that may have enabled a more stable transition, therefore, necessarily gave way to these debates, while military support during and after the intervention could not prevent—and sometimes encouraged—a fragmented security sector.

Special mention must be made of the role women and youth played in the events herein. Though most named political and military actors in this collection are male (a fact reflecting Libya's gender politics), the vast network of safe houses, aid, weaponry, medical and food distribution networks that supported them speak for the critical role of women. Women were also present as fighters, medics, diplomats, journalists, politicians and professionals, and staffed NTC and Libyan government offices. Similarly, most of these networks, and the vast majority of protestors and fighters, were males and females under thirty years old, who, as can be seen below, challenged the views and politics of their elders continually.

Part 1: The Revolution and its Governance

In 2011 an unprecedented wave of social protest, now known as the 'Arab Spring', surged through the Arab world, sparked by the self-immolation of the Tunisian street vendor Muhammad Bouazizi. Activists throughout the region sought to replicate the Tunisian example in their own countries, but the governments that proved most vulnerable were republics created by military coups:[1] Syria (whose first coup was in 1949) and Egypt (1952), which sparked imitative examples in Yemen (1962) and Libya (1969). These military-led states originally legitimised themselves by appealing to a republican and 'pan-Arab' nationalism, but by 2011 these narratives were defunct. As their populations swelled, their social support base shrank, while competing narratives, identities and political movements emerged based on sub-state communities (city, tribe), supra-state loyalties (political Islam, religious sects or cross-border kinships) or nationalism. 'Unable to marginalize these rival identities, state leaders … pursued authoritarian strategies', either manipulating or repressing them.[2] None could do so well enough when faced with the mass socio-economic protests of the Arab Spring, causing leadership changes and transitions in Egypt, Yemen and Libya, and protracted civil war in Syria. While Egypt and Tunisia's revolutions did not overturn state institutions and symbols—flags, constitutions, militaries and modes of governance—Libya's did.

Chapter 1, by Dirk Vandewalle, frames the 17 February Revolution—and this book—in this context. Elsewhere, Vandewalle has charted how Qadhafi's 1 September 1969 revolution undid an 'accidental' state created in 1951 by the UN General Assembly 'at the behest of the

Great Powers … without a unifying ideology or movement'.[3] 'Here, Vandewalle argues that Qadhafi's 'Green Revolution' further disrupted this nascent state by bypassing state institutions. This distrust of central authority, 'taken to a logical extreme under the *diktats* of his *Green Book*, was itself a symptom of … the tension between a hinterland culture and the culture represented by the country's urban areas' (page 22). Vandewalle posits that the revolution, like Libya's history and national identity, were contested by these long-repressed sub-national interests and identities, which 'as both Qadhafi and the NTC came to realize … were powerfully attractive and divisive' (page 19), concluding that 'today, as in 1951, there remain competing visions of what Libya should look like as a state' (page 27).

Subsequent chapters focus on the Libyan and international political actors seeking to guide the revolution and transition. In Chapter 2, Peter Bartu describes how the 'Provisional National Transitional Council', formed in Benghazi on 5 March 2011, endeavored to articulate the political direction of the revolution. Bartu argues that the NTC began as an extension of the temporary local councils that coalesced, in the wake of the collapse of Qadhafi's state, 'without a strategic imperative or vision' beyond calling for Qadhafi's removal and, to distance themselves from his authoritanarism, with 'a shared anxiety… to show they had not seized or assumed power'. Bartu charts the attempt of a dominant current of lawyers and political veterans within the NTC to delineate a political vision for the transition; initially the '5 May Roadmap', which was predicated on a negotiated ceasefire agreement with Qadhafi, followed by an inclusive transitional government in which senior armed forces and security services officials would 'avoid chaos during the transitional phase' (page 40). Bartu notes how this current's political imperatives were entwined with their need to gain early international cooperation 'to pay salaries and otherwise run a wartime economy' (page 43). This was facilitated by the creation of a Contact Group that included staunch support from Qatar, France, the UK and US in setting up creative extra-legal mechanisms to allow the NTC to receive oil products on credit, access Libyan sovereign assets abroad to pay salaries and to source Libyan currency printed offshore to deal with a liquidity crisis. This support, Bartu argues, was critical in allowing the NTC to meet 'a minimum threshold of legitimacy' (page 53).

Bartu notes, however, that the NTC's vision was successfully challenged by Islamist and Tripoli-centric elements within it. They sought

to dissolve the NTC and embark on a riskier, albeit more legitimate and democratic, transition, by electing an interim government—the General National Congress (GNC)—only 240 days after the end of the revolution was declared.

In Chapters 3 and 4, Peter Cole and Umar Khan expand on this factional discord within the NTC and its entwinement with international support by charting the competing planning and military networks that sought to influence the fall of Tripoli, both of which engendered diverging visions of Libya after Qadhafi. The architects of the '5 May Roadmap' sponsored a network of security service defectors in Tripoli, negotiating with community leaders from Qadhafi's support base with the hope that surgical strikes from NATO and a benign popular uprising could force capitulation from Qadhafi. Meanwhile, Tripoli-centric and 'Islamist' networks sought to empower frontline fighters to surround Tripoli's access routes and take on Qadhafi's security brigades by force. Both sides tried to manipulate regional hubs and actors, particularly Misrata and Zintan, to see their vision fulfilled. They also manipulated, and were manipulated by, partnerships with NATO member states, particularly the UK, US and France, as well as Qatar and the UAE, which offered both coordination with NATO's air campaign and political cover for weapons and ammunition supplies. However, 'parts of both plans succeeded, but much of both failed when confronted by a more chaotic reality', namely the rapid growth of Tripolitanian armed groups, and the rapid influx of fighters into the capital. Those who hoped the NTC would helm a stable transition atop remaining security institutions and ministries found that they struggled to cope. Those who wished to empower the new 'revolutionary' forces, and reelect a transitional government after Qadhafi's fall, faced an ensuing struggle for power in the security sector. The contours of Libya's new politics forged in 'Tripoli's haphazard fall… created competing visions over… who should and shouldn't be empowered'; the surviving institutions of the Libyan state, the new 'revolutionaries', or the NTC's executive. The balancing of these interests fell primarily to Mustafa Abd al-Jalil, whose role in doing so is still not perhaps fully appreciated or understood.

These internal Libyan struggles were shaped in the context of international intervention, the legal and military framework for which was UNSCR 1970 and 1973, and the 'no-fly zone' imposed by French, US and UK, and then NATO, forces. UNSCR 1973, which allowed 'all

necessary means' excepting a 'foreign occupation force' to protect civilians from harm,[4] was justified by a new doctrine named 'Right to Protect' (R2P), developed following UN failures to prevent massacres in Rwanda (1994), Srebrenica (1995) and Kosovo (1998–9). It culminated in a 2005 UN General Assembly document which said that 'should peaceful means be inadequate', the UN was entitled 'to take collective action' under Chapter VII of its Charter, which authorised military force 'to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.'[5] The doctrine was invoked to prevent an apparently imminent massacre in Benghazi following Qadhafi's threat to cleanse Libya 'inch by inch, house by house, street by street', and as its first explicit application, Libya became a case study for its use.[6] In doing so it protected an already-armed uprising that had little clear political direction.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine NATO and the United Nations' engagement with Libyan opposition forces—later its transitional authorities. Both sought a 'light footprint' in Libya following lessons learned from previous interventions in the greater Middle East and beyond, and this in part determined their successes and challenges. The UN, after some setbacks in directly administered interventions in Somalia (1992–4) and Kosovo (1998), convened a panel chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi to review UN peacekeeping operations which advocated smaller, politically-led missions, and called light footprint, that minimised international staff, working instead through national staff, NGOs and coordinated international assistance.[7] Likewise, those in military circles had learned from the 2001 NATO intervention in Afghanistan and 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which resulted in repeated deployments and indefinite end goals of 'nationbuilding'. Domestic insurgencies and other asymmetric security challenges were countered with modern COIN (counter-insurgency) doctrines focused on special operations and intelligence agents building relationships with local partners, supported by air power, also called 'light footprint',[8] subsequently employed by NATO powers in Libya in 2011.

In Chapter 5, Frederic Wehrey evaluates NATO's 'light footprint' air campaign in Libya—the 'so-called Afghan model' based on 'the combination of precision airpower, ground advisers, supplies, and training' (page 125) and the delicate partnership that therefore evolved between NATO, its member states, and the Libyan opposition fighters. Charting how the no-fly zone 'shifted the tide of battle at crucial stages

of the revolution' (page 106), from the eastern frontline at Brega, to keeping Misrata's port open, and backing up the rapid advance of Nafusa Mountain fighters into Tripoli, Wehrey notes the challenges this type of mission posed: difficulties in target assessment and intelligence; political and operational disunity between rebel fighters; and a UNSCR mandate that the NTC stipulated forbade 'boots on the ground'. To overcome these challenges NATO and member states sent 'ground advisers' to partner with Libyans, setting up communications and operations rooms that routed directly to NATO, AFRICOM, and other externally-based central commands. Wehrey concludes that the success of the NATO campaign was dependent on this 'political and operational unity' between Libyan fighters and NATO member states. Yet Wehrey also notes that this model invited competition between them and their local partners, which was particularly prominent in Benghazi and the Nafusa Mountains.

In Chapter 6, Ian Martin, who led the UN mission in Libya, reviews the issues facing the first year of the transition, including the 7 July 2012 elections, the political and managerial issues in the security sector and transitional justice. In all three, Martin notes, 'Libyans… were determined to be in control of the transition, and were wary of post-conflict situations dominated by external actors' (page 129). Martin argues that this 'Libyan-led' approach matched the UN's evolving thinking on designing peacekeeping missions with a 'light footprint'.[9] The NTC, 'firm in its desire to avoid "boots on the ground"' … articulated the parameters of the support it wished to receive', meaning that where Libyan authorities were decisive, as with the swift and smooth election of the GNC on 7 July 2012, the international community could successfully support the transition.

Martin also highlights limits of the mandate and 'light footprint' design, including the inability of the UN to intervene 'at key moments of internal disarray', or where the NTC did not request support or was otherwise constrained by its short timeframe and limited legitimacy, which saw decisions postponed 'before a stronger government with a basis of democratic legitimacy was in place'. Martin argues that 'the greatest failure' of the transition, for these reasons, was in Libyan attempts to command its security sector, where 'an ideological divide that emerged between some who preferred a managed transition with the participation of elements of the former regime's security forces, and those revolutionaries—particularly Misratans, civilian fighters from

the east and former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—who wanted to exclude these elements'. Martin discusses how the consequent government paralysis over the issue, and the severely limited capacities of the police and armed forces, hampered international support efforts, and instead led to the rise of parallel security forces—the Supreme Security Committees, Libya Shield Forces, Border Guard and others—staffed by salaried, but untrained, civilian fighters.

Chapter 7, by Marieke Wierda, who led the UN's Transitional Justice support team, outlines the transitional justice challenges facing Libyans. Wierda examines the NTC's initial 'relatively modest process' of excluding 'only those with, in Abd al-Jalil's formulation, "blood on their hands"', which was inspired by the lessons of Debaathification in Iraq. Wierda concludes, however, that even these efforts were quickly sidelined by other political currents in and outside the NTC, including the local revolutionary fighters or *thuwwar* who demanded a wide-ranging 'political isolation law' and the powers to arrest, detain and interrogate those they deemed political criminals. These fighters' command of prisons and prisoners in illegal detention prevented the processing of detainees and trials of senior Qadhafi-era figures, while granting amnesties to the *thuwwar* themselves. Wierda pays particular attention to the disparity between Libyans' desire to deal internally with their transitional justice issues and the international best practice of the International Criminal Court, to which the UN Security Council referred Libya on 25 February 2011, but which Libyan authorities and armed groups rebuffed. Wierda's chapter, as with Ian Martin's, highlights the challenges of the early transmission of powers to state institutions that lacked capacity to address their extraordinary circumstances, and how this has dictated governance after the 17 February Revolution.

Thus the original questions posed by Libya's 'statelessness'—the lack of a head of state, constitution, charismatic authority or state institution to guide the 17 February Revolution and its transition dominated Libyan politics well into 2013. Later events such as the death of US Ambassador Chris Stephens on 11 September 2012, or Prime Minister Zaidan's formal request for NATO assistance in the security sector in May 2013, unaddressed in this volume, compelled new international engagement to grapple with the questions that the 'light footprint' military and UN interventions left unaddressed. All the while, Libya's subnational political forces—the *thuwwar*, political Islam, tribes and insistent eastern regionalism sought to make their voices heard.

Part 2: Sub-national Identities and Narratives

Part 2 of this volume examines these sub-national social forces and identities shaping Libya's revolution, which frequently challenged or worked independently of the transitional authorities and their international supporters. In Chapter 1, Vandewalle notes 'both Qadhafi and the NTC came to realise during the revolution … long-submerged sub-national interests and identities were powerfully attractive and divisive.' Those sub-national interests and identities were older than, and transcended, the state; for them, the 17 February Revolution was but the most recent event in their own far older narratives. Communities fighting or defending Qadhafi or the state retold and reappropriated their historic resistances during the Ottoman and Italian colonial enterprises, creating new icons like Misrata's Ramadan Suwaihli, Nalut's Khalifa bin Askar, and eastern Libya's Umar al-Mukhtar.[10]

'Sub-national identities' is a term used in international relations theory to refer to concepts such as 'tribe'. The English word 'tribe' is imperfect, being an artifact of early anthropological efforts to translate social and kinship networks into discrete units of analysis.[11] In modern anthropology the concept of 'tribe'—segmentary genealogy—includes multiple signifiers: social narratives projected into the past justifying present interpersonal and intergroup relationships; value systems of honour and group reputation; received oral histories.[12] These all apply to the way the word 'tribe' is used in this volume. The Libyan political scientist Amal Obeidi also employed a definition of 'tribe' as invoking either solidarity based on common descent, long, close contact between members of a social or economic group, or a combination of these and other factors such as common geography.[13] If foreign observers risked misinterpreting 'tribal' loyalties in Libya, Libyans did too. The chapters of this section illustrate how Libyan actors took time to understand when and how 'tribes' were relevant. Qadhafi's governance attempted to manipulate and control the same 'tribalism' that had led to internal conflict when fighting against the Ottomans and Italians, yet ultimately failed with respect to Zintan and the Tebu. Likewise, the eastern federalist project tried to mobilise an eastern identity based around tribes, but failed.

The events of 2011 also created, or reinvigorated, political networks and identities that supported the revolution, but challenged the status quo during the transition in various ways. One, discussed in Chapters

5–7, are the 'revolutionaries' or *thuwwar*, who, barring some personal and communal rivalries, were closely knit by the experience of fighting together against Qadhafi, and the NATO operations rooms, shipping, humanitarian aid, arms and money networks that connected them. They did not challenge the democratic transition in Libya, but sought to join it, voting in (and some providing 'security' for) the 7 July elections; others ran as candidates, creating a political bloc in the GNC. All the while they challenged the assumption that the rump state and its armed forces, which the NTC executive inherited, were the sole legitimate actors in Libya, and sought political alliances among ministers and the GNC to constrain them.

Chapter 8, by Mary Fitzgerald, examines Islamist movements that alternatively supported and challenged the status quo created by Libya's transitional authorities. Taking a practical definition[14] of Islamism as 'support for the introduction of Islamic tenets into political life through the implementation of *sharia*'[15] (page 177), Fitzgerald delineates the various ideological trends of political Islam active in Libya in 2011, from the Muslim Brotherhood, to Salafism, to the spectrum of political *jihadism*, whilst also emphasising how a shared history of political persecution bonded them as a community. All the while, they 'contended with more radical elements both critical of their engagement in politics and determined to disrupt the country's democratic trajectory' (page 204). Fitzgerald sees Libya's Islamists as entering a crisis of identity in Libya's transition, as their primary unifying factor—opposition to Qadhafi, and the experience of his repression—ceased to hold currency. Fitzgerald traces the attempts of Libya's various Islamic movements to unite under 'a national umbrella movement' (page 184) aiming to challenge the NTC's 'secular' orientation through civil society work and political lobbying. As with tribalism, however, being 'Islamist' or 'Islamic' was not enough to command a unified point of view, and Libya's Islamic groups failed to create a united political front post-revolution. Yet 'the failure of Libya's self-described "Islamic current" to unite,' Fitzgerald argues, 'did not mean they were a spent force' (page 204). Islamists turned to either influencing the security structures of the new Libya, or else 'rallying' and building 'alliances … in the General National Congress' (page 204).

In Chapter 9, Sean Kane describes a more existential challenge to the Libyan transition: an attempt by some easterners to reject the NTC

and revert to the Libyan constitution of 1951, granting them autonomy under a 'federal' state. Kane details how the resurgence of 'federalism' grew as the NTC, originally heavily eastern in its makeup, moved to Tripoli and took over the rump of Qadhafi's state apparatus. Kane argues that 'federalists' did not reject the 17 February Revolution, noting that some federalist leaders were founders of the NTC. Nevertheless, they feared that the NTC, by moving to Tripoli and governing through Qadhafi's ministries, was succumbing to 'a stealthy return to the *status quo ante*' (page 214) wherein all administrative functions were centralised in Tripoli. Eastern federalists, Kane argues, reverted to, and tried to exploit, a 'tribal' and regional identity based on 'common shared lineage', and shared memories of traditional influence during the monarchy of King Idris. Kane argues, however, that federalists failed to promote a boycott of the 7 July 2012 elections, partly because the 'tribalism' it appealed to ultimately limited it. A variety of alternatives to tribal organisation existed in 2012 that did not exist in 1951, including political parties, Islamist movements, civil society and youth groups. Likewise, within the tribal families and houses that potentially could have gained from federalism a wide variety of political opinions emerged, some supporting its members in the NTC, others going on an even more militant path. Eastern identity, Kane argues, was a rich mix of heritage and influences that was beyond the ability of any one 'tribal leader' or political family to embody or command. In this way, perhaps, the federalists attempted to appeal to the same tribal dynamics as Qadhafi, and failed for the same reasons.

In Chapter 10, Brian McQuinn offers an anthropological account of how sub-national narratives and close-knit social networks underpinned the formation of the 236 armed groups to emerge from Misrata. McQuinn reconstructs the events of the siege of Misrata from February to July 2011—one of the most pivotal battles of the uprising—demonstrating how the goals, identity and discipline of Misratan fighters was driven partly by their sense of destiny, embodied in the historical figure of Ramadan Suwaihli and the history of the Tripolitanian Republic, which saw Misrata become temporarily independent. McQuinn argues that, while this 'sense of historical destiny was mythologised' (page 231), its revival defined Misrata's political direction and identity. The chapter likewise illustrates how Misratan fighting units shaped that direction, undergoing organisational transformation from urban warfare to frontline combat fighting, aided by

neighbourhood executive committees, military suppliers and NATO ground advisers.

Chapter 11 discusses the Arab and Amazigh Nafusa Mountains uprisings as embedded in the same micro-politics of communities and 'their historic local struggles against each other' (page 258). Wolfram Lacher and Ahmed Labnouj explain how both loyalist and revolutionary communities 'activated historical allegiances with other regions' (page ???), including the Tebu, Tuareg and littoral, which surpassed any one cohering national identity. The authors describe how Zintan and Nalut's critical defections in February 2011 were marked by Qadhafi's failure to manipulate its communal allegiances and financial interests, with elders' struggling and failing to balance those considerations against their pro-revolutionary youth. The chapter echoes themes expressed elsewhere in the volume by noting the role of military defectors in armed group formation and political liaison, and how the arrival of NATO ground advisers in summer 2011 'fomented discord among mountain towns' (page 273). The chapter also traces how, in the year following Qadhafi's death, the reactivation of local identities in Nafusa led to communities prioritising their interests in the transition, either with or against the state. An 'expansionary' Zintan took control of a tract stretching from Tripoli to Sabha and the Algerian border, formalising its control of western borders and southern oil fields through the defence minister, Usama Juwaili, while Amazigh towns asserted their linguistic and cultural identity through political activism.

Chapter 12 charts how the same tribal micropolitics of the west and south spurred loyalism to Qadhafi, focusing on one specific community, Bani Walid. Peter Cole traces how these communities' political views, like those of Misrata, were rooted in a history beginning with the tribal confederations against the Ottomans and Italians. On independence, they 'formed part of the bedrock of the Libyan state in the west' (page 288) and their identity was based around the belief they were the 'protectors of independent Libyan statehood' against foreign incursions (page 289). Cole argues that the key to understanding Bani Walid's loyalism was Qadhafi's manipulation of tribal and social leadership in the town following a failed coup by Bani Walid officers in 1993. This coup also saw Qadhafi further sideline the armed forces and rapidly expand his security brigades, which he staffed with loyal tribes and communities, thus creating the security landscape faced by Libyans

during the 17 February Revolution. Community safety identity and state security were thus intimately entwined in Qadhafi's security state, explaining why a town such as Bani Walid fought to the bitter end to support Qadhafi, while others joined the revolution.

Chapter 13 focuses on the narrative of Libya's Tebu in southern Libya. Rebecca Murray recounts with a journalistic sensibility the hopes and fears of many of their key political and military leaders. Murray illustrates how the Tebu's alternate participation in, and alienation from, the state, focusing on the impact of the Chadian wars on Qadhafi's manipulation of the Tebu and their migration between Libya, Chad and Niger. The young politicians and soldiers of those years became the political activists and commanders of 2011, and the issues of their ethnicity—citizenship issues, illiteracy, racism, and population explosion and competition in oasis towns over smuggling income and agricultural resources—estranged them as much from their NTC allies as from Qadhafi's government. Murray, as do Lacher and Labnouj in Chapter 11, portrays a people whose political struggle did not end with Qadhafi's fall, and who have cannily fostered local alliances over national identity.

In Chapter 14, Yvan Guichaoua focuses on southern Libya's other cross-border ethnic minority, the Tuareg. While Chapter 9 portrays a Libyan Tuareg divided and ruled by their newly empowered northern neighbours, Zintan and Nalut, Guichaoua portrays a Tuareg buffeted by political and economic forces that they could not control, yet they sought to become masters of their political destinies in Niger and Mali. Guichaoua traces Qadhafi's Nigerien and Malian Tuareg fighters' diverging paths back to the origins of their relationship with Qadhafi, describing in detail the dynamics that led to the collapse of the Malian state, and the Tuareg's support of the flight of Libyan loyalists into Niger. Guichaoua embeds this analysis in the context of the Sahara's political economy, 'perpetuated over centuries by long-distance travellers exchanging a wide range of licit and illicit commodities, building networks, accumulating social and financial capital, and, more recently, exploiting the economic and political opportunities afforded by Qadhafi in Libya' (page 323). Guichaoua discusses how this economy drew Libyan state and nonstate actors into a codependent economic relationship that was increasingly strained by demographic trends, religious extremism and Qadhafi's sponsorship of Tuareg armed groups and rebellions.

Conclusion

Libyan politics often feels inertial or at constant risk of irrevocable factionalism. The essays in this volume portray various aspects of a people seeking a new national identity and political direction; a rump state challenged by a variety of sub-national identities older than itself. They portray an international intervention that wished, like their Libyan partners, a limited and risk-averse 'light footprint' that bequeathed national self-determination to Libyans. But with no institutional or charismatic authority, the issue of which Libyans should determine their nation's future provoked discord that the international community could only observe, and attempt to influence.

Uncertain as the future of Libya's transition is, none of Libya's powerful local forces—tribalism, regionalism, Islamism, or the ethnic politics of the Amazigh, Tebu and Tuareg—have yet proved sufficient to tear the country apart, though the revolution reawoke diverse conceptions of local and national identity that Qadhafi had manipulated or suppressed. Libyan national identity is difficult to pinpoint—it rests, perhaps, on shared bloodlines, customs, and traditions, rather than on shared institutions or enemies—but it has proven elastic enough to absorb these vastly different local communities, even those in mortal disagreement. It has been observed above that the chapters in this volume present a collection of narrative strands that are frequently discordant, yet coherent, and that this is more authentically 'Libyan' than any single narrative could be. If Libya can develop institutions that contain the political dialogue or disagreement between these various strands, then a bright future awaits it.

PART 1

THE REVOLUTION AND ITS GOVERNANCE

1

LIBYA'S UNCERTAIN REVOLUTION

Dirk Vandewalle

All revolutions experience what Leonard Binder, writing about Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt after 1952, characterised as a 'moment of enthusiasm': the euphoria that an old regime has been replaced; the temporary unity before age-old divisions and cleavages reassert themselves; and the moment before old state structures—fragmentary or wholesale—reappear.[1] It marks the time before the need to create new state institutions introduces the wrenching choices the country's new rulers must make—often, as in Libya, while possessing very little capacity to do so. Invariably, revolutions contain their own legitimating rhetoric. And inevitably, this moment of enthusiasm wanes—to use Weber's often-cited dictum, the charismatic must yield to the bureaucratic. Post-revolutionary rulers throughout the history of the modern Middle East and North Africa have found themselves weighing what of the past should be salvaged, refashioned or jettisoned, and how revolutionary rhetoric serves post-revolutionary reality.

In some revolutions the institutions and social structures left by previous governments and regimes can be adapted into new statebuilding elements. But oil exporters like Algeria, Indonesia or Nigeria that have undergone revolutions or civil wars have tended to exhibit lagging

institutional development influenced by extensive patronage, creating inequalities, distrust and entitlements that inhibit reform and reconstruction. In Libya, where state institutions had been ignored, neglected or outright destroyed for decades, and where oil flowed into the national economy before any real institutional development took place, uncertain and extended post-revolutionary adjustments were inevitably needed to endow state institutions with the legitimacy required to function. Marx's observation that men create their own history within the structural constraints of the past weighed perhaps nowhere as heavily as during the Arab Spring as in Libya.

Libya's own moment of enthusiasm arguably lasted eight months: from the death of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi on 20 October 2011 until the elections of 7 July 2012. It was generated not only by the rebels' victory, but also by the emerging institutional symbols of democracy—an elected government, free press and vibrant civil society. Yet the country's institutions had neither the capacity nor mechanisms to support this new political system. Some observers hoped that the institutional tabula rasa left by Qadhafi meant that the new state would not, as in other Arab Spring countries, have to remove the barnacles of the 'deep state' that had slowed down or even reversed political reconstruction.[2] Disillusion set in, however, as the country's militias formed an insurmountable obstacle, leaving the National Transitional Council (NTC) without the coercive power to affect decisions.

The removal of Libya's dictatorship raised significant worries over how its new rulers would create, virtually *ex nihilo*, new governing institutions and a sense of identity and community out of the ashes of a history that, since 1969, had glorified the very destruction of those institutions. The challenge was turning the subjects of a former dictator, in an oil state where economic hand-outs substituted for policy, into citizens with a sense of political responsibilities, duties and obligations towards the state. How could the country's new rulers prevent individuals or groups pursuing their own interests at the nation's expense? In sum, how heavily would the shadow of past legacies weigh on the new Libya—and how would those legacies also become a shadow of the country's future?

* * *

The chapters in this book illuminate those dilemmas by focusing on different aspects of Libya's revolution and its aftermath. They accentuate

the way Libya's historical problems with central authority—immeasurably exacerbated by Qadhafi's political experimentation—persisted despite new, contemporary and discontinuous post-revolutionary events. They describe how the revolution unleashed social and political groups—tribes, old and new elites, Salafi and jihadist movements, militias, returned exiles, cities and regions, old government supporters—that reinvigorated the social structures Qadhafi declared archaic and obsolete. But they also indicate where, in important and unexpected ways, the Libyan revolution has been and remains *sui generis*.

Whether some of these groups in Libya have acquired real power remains contentious, as illustrated in this volume. Some argue, for example, that tribes constituted a powerful force in Libyan society during the civil war. Certainly, both sides' assiduous attempts to cultivate their loyalty—even Qadhafi who had once declared them useless before reinvigorating the tribal elder system in the 1990s—contributes to the impression that they were political actors in the revolution and then beyond. Others, however, have argued that beyond their social purpose tribes retained little relevance in Libya's current political system, that both sides needed to cultivate their support during the revolution but that the tribes, in a traditional pattern, carefully stayed on the sidelines, and weighed their options.[3]

The *jamahiriyya*[4] had always appeared so immobile, held in check by the late dictator's repressive security services, that meaningful political opposition movements no longer existed when the revolution started. Below this chimera of placidity, however, were a large number of social, economic, political, tribal, regional and ethnic problems that had been held in abeyance, or declared no longer existent, for over four decades. Much as both Qadhafi and the NTC came to realise in their wooing of Islamic sentiments and tribal loyalties, these long-submerged sub-national interests and identities were powerfully attractive and divisive, posing critical issues for the country's way forward. Above all, balancing the needs of western, southern and eastern Libya constituted a baseline for all major political developments in Libya.

It would have been utterly unrealistic, of course, to expect on 20 October 2011, when the *jamahiriyya* became a political bygone, that these tensions would not resurface. Inadvertently, the revolution reexposed differences between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, by Benghazi's considering itself the cradle of the revolution and founding place of the NTC. The euphoria following the end of the war, and in part because

of the legitimacy of the national elections in July 2012, suspended these competing claims and expectations—even though the killing of Abd al-Fattah Yunis in late July 2011 indicated the fragility of a society riven by traditional historical fractures.

While post-revolutionary countries always present a tabula rasa—and Qadhafi's *jamahiriyya* particularly so—this vacuum is often seized upon by competing factions whose fates were affected by the revolution. In Libya, the ability to shape the political landscape and fill this vacuum was a race against time: a window of opportunity to restructure and refashion political and social institutions and economic arrangements before the disintegrative, centrifugal forces of sub-national or supra-national loyalties—whether tribal or geographical, linked to circles of patronage or to Islamic movements—could assert and consolidate themselves.

During the administrations of the NTC and General National Congress (GNC) this window of opportunity narrowed considerably, and valuable opportunities were lost. What one observer noted in the political arena—that 'for now … the institutional void forms a major obstacle to democratisation'—appeared true of virtually all major aspects of public life in Libya during the transition.[5] In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I detail the difficulties in creating this new state, the obstacles its new rulers faced in implementing national policies and what these portend for Libya's future as a unified nation.

* * *

History provides particularly meaningful clues to Libya's difficulties in consolidating its revolution and refashioning the state. Throughout 2011, observers noted that its tumultuous history since independence in 1951 had created disturbing social, political and economic legacies that would impact the country's rebuilding after Qadhafi.[6] The political disenfranchisement of the population during the monarchy and the Qadhafi years had left an especially heavy legacy of distrust of national institutions, a lack of interpersonal trust, and the absence of personal initiative. These were exacerbated by Qadhafi's extensive security organisations and manipulation of oil revenues within a carefully calibrated patronage system that immobilised Libyans politically, socially and economically. The NTC inherited these legacies as it tried to develop organisational and policy coherence during the revolution.

This challenge was enormous, irrespective of the widespread international support and expertise it garnered and was willing to accept.

Although some Libyan state institutions existed, they were put to the purpose of preserving Qadhafi and his family, not the state. Those who embodied the state had failed to regulate its institutions; instead, Qadhafi had intervened in a wholesale fashion, arbitrarily determining how Libyans should be governed, to the extent that arguably '[t]he only encompassing "institution" in Libya was [Qadhafi] himself and his clutch of advisers. Subordinate institutions were entangled in overlapping and contradictory networks with no common ordering principle or chain of authority beyond Qadhafi's presence at the top of every heap.'[7]

The only real exception was the country's well-provided-for coercive institutions—a coterie of Revolutionary Committees and security organisations that reported directly to Qadhafi's residences at Bab al-Aziziyya, the nerve centre of government. Libya during the monarchical and Qadhafi years never developed a truly national, professional army that could act as a buffer and intermediary when popular uprisings erupted. Instead, a system of security brigades, headed and often staffed by Qadhafi confidants and loyalist groups, formed the core of Qadhafi's protective umbrella. Both the Revolutionary Committee system and the brigades disappeared with Qadhafi, leaving a security vacuum, into which stepped a multiplicity of militias, empowered both by their role in the revolution and by the massive amounts of Qadhafi-era arms left unattended during the conflict.

Libya also had no effective political intermediaries or leadership figures that enjoyed national visibility or a high level of legitimacy. Some in the NTC's top leadership had held high-level positions in Libya after 2003 when the government, under Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi's guidance, attempted a desultory series of economic and political reforms. Their coalescence and ability to act under the difficult circumstances of February 2011 was partly because the NTC's core consisted of a group of lawyers from eastern Libya who knew and trusted each other. None, however, enjoyed high political standing or a nationwide following that cut across the country's sub-national, regional or local loyalties. Many would prove unable to build strong ties with those who fought against Qadhafi, exposing the division between those who experienced the fighting first hand, and the political leadership initially in charge of its direction. Even those outside Libya—such as Dr Muhammad Mugharyif, who had faithfully guided the country's main opposition

movement to Qadhafi during decades in exile, proved to have little political traction inside Libya when they returned.

This collective amnesia and distrust of those who had not been active participants in the revolution quickly became and remained a dividing point in the postwar period. The central dilemma for Libya was that those who fought the revolution—the '*thuwwar*', or revolutionaries—refused to disarm until they felt they trusted those representing the state, while those in charge of the state argued that the continued presence of the *thuwwar* prevented them from building that state. This bifurcation into two camps, described as the 'revolutionary sector' versus a sector that wanted to create or resuscitate institutions at the expense of the *thuwwar*—became one of the enduring characteristics of post-revolutionary Libya,[8] though in practice different groups for their own purposes navigated back and forth between the two sides, and the *thuwwar* themselves often splintered into sub-groups with their own agendas and goals.

This distrust and opportunism partly resulted from two aspects of Qadhafi's rule that destroyed any sense of cooperation and left many Libyans with a profound dislike of national institutions and those who represented them. Firstly, almost by osmosis, many of the political ideas Qadhafi once espoused about the evils of political representation and political parties had been inculcated in many Libyans, leaving them with few mechanisms for cooperation between different political currents during and after the revolution. A popular quip in Libya noted 'there is a little Qadhafi in all of us.' Although Qadhafi had insisted that his system of popular committees and congresses embodied a perfect and decentralised democracy, this experimentation had systematically destroyed not only the necessary institutions of a modern democratic polity, but also the supporting norms and arrangements—trust in the system, interpersonal trust, the willingness to provide guarantees to those who lose out in political contestations—that sustain democratic systems. Qadhafi's nullification of all forms of affiliation—the country's tribal system, labour unions, civil society organisations, and organised Islam—that had traditionally provided alternative forms of identity and allegiance to citizenship meant that the NTC and its backers encountered a low sense of political community and a *sauve-qui-peut* attitude among Libya's citizens.

Even so, Qadhafi's distrust of central authority, though taken to a logical extreme in his *Green Book*, was itself a symptom of a profounder

and older Libyan phenomenon. This was the tension between a hinterland culture and the culture represented by the country's urban areas that precedes even the country's independence in 1951. Libya's modern history in part reflects the contestation of these cultures over power and national identity.[9] In the power vacuum and with the incapacitated government left in the wake of the revolution, this contest—also the contest of central-versus-decentralised power—surfaced again. Tripoli's new rulers were faced with new revolutionary battalions whose power they could not control, cities and towns largely running their own affairs and a longstanding desire for greater autonomy in Cyrenaica that harkened back to Libya's original 1951 constitution.[10]

The second aspect contributing to Libyans' lack of cooperation, and distrust of national institutions, was the Qadhafi regime's systematic use of economic patronage, ranging from simple economic goods to jobs and education, which had become a tool to divide and rule individuals and make them dependent on government largesse. Noncompliance with Qadhafi's directives simply meant the end of access to patronage.[11] Patronage therefore politically and economically immobilised most Libyans, made cooperation on communal goals problematic, and created an enormous sense of entitlement that lingered on after 2011, when, in the absence of state capacity, individuals and groups often grabbed what they could at the expense of the public interest.[12] Oil revenues were crucial in allowing Qadhafi to use distributive largesse to keep Libya politically immobile, rather than creating modern state institutions with bonds of reciprocal duties and obligations between the state and its citizens.

* * *

Some chapters in this volume make clear that the NTC understood that they stood at the beginning of a long, difficult process of national consolidation and integration that would witness a struggle for power once Qadhafi was removed. Even so, few anticipated what the impact would be when a closed society, unable to contemplate or express any ideas beyond those espoused by Qadhafi, suddenly saw those restraints removed. The NTC arguably underestimated the extent to which the country would be subjected to the centrifugal forces of Libya's battalions, tribes, and regional and Islamist movements. As the chapters by Frederic Wehrey and Mary Fitzgerald testify, they could not have pre-

dicted how the dynamics of the revolution created a political landscape in which previously unknown actors—most notably the country's militias but also Islamist groups of various political inclinations—would contest the NTC's vision of a new Libya with central, transparent institutions.

The NTC's main problem was that its transitional executive branches did not possess the basic state capacities needed to implement their vision, nor a monopoly on coercive power. Qadhafi's deliberate monopoly on decision making left Libya's governing institutions unable to defend themselves, ideologically or physically, against actors whose own vision of what Libya's new state should look like stood in stark contrast to theirs. The executive branch was thus reduced to convincing different militias and opposition groups to incorporate under the aegis of national institutions (such as the army, police force, different bureaucracies and ministries). Despite some limited success, lingering incoherence in these institutions made these attempts arduous and slow, and left basic authority and capacity in essential areas like tax collection, border control, and law enforcement, lacking.

This dim picture contrasted with the country's emergent political life. With only a slight delay, following the guidelines laid down by the NTC in its Constitutional Declaration of August 2011, the national elections of 7 July 2012 were hailed by Libyans as a major achievement. Having barely emerged from the highly exclusionary *jamahiriyya*, which forbade political parties, Libya's elections were indeed remarkable—with much of the credit due not only to Libyans themselves but also to the international community, especially the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The NTC's ability to fulfil its own roadmap for national elections and hand over power to the elected GNC in August 2013 indicated that Libyan institutions could meet important political thresholds.

The July elections were also considered, by Libyans and the international community alike, as harbingers of the kind of political community Libya could create. An important question was whether this first attempt at national political institutionalisation would prove resilient and inclusive enough to rein in the divisive forces the country faced: tribalism and regionalism; federalism in eastern Libya; different forms of Islamism; and the country's militias. The NTC's leadership debated this very question, and with it, whether the new political system (institutionalised around the GNC) could prevent the abuse of oil revenues

to recreate the powerful patronage mechanisms that had immobilised politics and the country's population during Qadhafi's *jamahiriyya*—but also kept the country stabilised.

In the event, the elections demonstrated Libya's inexperience of political organisation. Party platforms were hardly articulated, and revolved around individuals rather than representing clear presentations of political views. The population's understanding of the country's political process and procedures often seemed rudimentary. None of this was helped by a somewhat awkward electoral system that combined proportional and majoritarian representation for GNC seats, designed purposely to ascertain that no political group would dominate the elections. Libyans' expectations that the July 2012 elections would effortlessly lead to a democratic system, despite Libya's lack of institutions and historical references that could underpin it, proved unrealistic. Few saw that the creation of truly national political institutions inevitably takes years to accomplish.

Libya also embarked on its transition with little unified national identity or consolidation of political interests. Instead, the country's elections were only a prelude to the challenge of constructing a national identity that both the monarchy and Qadhafi after 1969 had discouraged. The GNC and the transitional executive administration purported to govern in the name of a nation that had little prior identity, and, unsurprisingly a good amount of confusion arose over its purpose and legitimacy. The political infighting and the pressure from revolutionary battalions it suffered showed that it became valued for what it could deliver to different groups—for example by assigning important ministerial positions to powerful groups from Misrata and Zintan—rather than as an institution where national policies were forged through compromise and dialogue. While the institutions that held the national elections succeeded, therefore, the country's political institutions fared less well.

But Libya's lack of national identity was perhaps most dramatically expressed by the debate over federalism and decentralisation that punctuated the transitional era. These debates, though obscured during the war, originated with the creation of Libya in 1951. Though during the 2011 conflict, eastern Libyans voiced strong, palpably shared feelings that 'Libya is free' and indivisible, debates over autonomy for Cyrenaica and special privileges for the different provinces continued soon after the NTC's move to Tripoli. But they did not threaten the NTC's

Constitutional Declaration, which envisaged the continuation of a unified and centralised state until at least the drawing up of a constitution. At first, the federalist movement in Cyrenaica, consolidated around Ahmad Zubair al-Sanusi, attracted few supporters and the exigencies of marketing the country's oil to sustain the transition was largely unchallenged. As in the country's earlier history, oil tied Libya closer together rather than pushing its constituencies apart.

Over time, these dynamics changed dramatically as some easterners grew disillusioned with the NTC and GNC, whose administrations met demands for decentralisation with periodic handouts and subventions and announcements (unimplemented) of their intention to relocate national companies and institutions to Benghazi. But over time the uneasy relationship between Cyrenaica (Barqa) and Tripolitania, and also between southern Libya (where long neglected minorities raised citizenship, identity, and cultural rights issues) and the two northern provinces, made these debates over federalism and decentralisation more intransigent.

This deteriorating relationship culminated in the unilateral announcement by Sanusi of a Transitional Council of Barqa on 1 June 2013, outfitted with its own congress, senate and provincial government. By itself it was not necessarily a turning point in Libya's fortunes, but rather part of a continuum of actions taken by the federalists that started before the national elections. The occupation of Cyrenaican oilfields and installations that followed Sanusi's announcement in summer 2013, however, indicated that the tactics of those arguing for greater political and economic power had shifted considerably. A psychological threshold had seemingly been crossed. For the first time, Sanusi's essentially tame federalist rhetoric had been superseded by groups willing to take direct action against national assets.

A similar line was crossed during debates surrounding the country's Political Isolation Law, summarily settled in summer 2013 when the *thuwwar* physically surrounded several ministries and the GNC to intimidate the latter into passing it. The law, meant to remove former Qadhafi personnel from the country's political, economic, educational and security institutions, represented a purely punitive instrument, without any of the conciliatory measures that have proved instrumental in reconstructing several other states after civil wars. Although Marieke Wierda's chapter in this volume pinpoints efforts at constructing a legislative groundwork for aspects of transitional justice, its pursuit has remained haphazard until today.