

NOVEMBER 2011

ANTHONY BELL, SPENCER BUTTS, AND DAVID WITTER

THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

THE TIDE TURNS

PART 4



Photo Credit: Fighters for Libya's interim government rejoice after winning control of the Qaddafi stronghold of Bani Walid, via Wikimedia Commons.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION | PART 4- THE TIDE TURNS | BELL, BUTTS, & WITTER | NOVEMBER 2011

This report is the final installment of a four-part series on the revolution in Libya. *Part Four: The Tide Turns* details the final rebel offensives and the challenges the new government faces. The first section documents the conflict in the Nafusa Mountains, the characteristics of the rebel forces and the factors that led to their breakout. The second section explains the taking of Tripoli and the fighting at the last remaining strongholds. Lastly, the final section discusses the obstacles the rebels must overcome to stabilize the country and transition to a democracy successfully.

THE NAFUSA MOUNTAINS CAMPAIGN

- The Nafusa Mountains, an escarpment of low-lying mountains in western Tripolitania just south of the Jafara Plain, stretch approximately 150 miles west from the border with Tunisia to the city of Gharyan. The Nafusa Mountains are home to the Libya's Berber population as well as a minority of Arabs.
- The population centers in the Nafusa are scattered across the mountains, ranging from larger cities such as Gharyan, Zintan, Yafran, Nalut and Jadu to dozens of small villages. Most of the settlements are set atop the Nafusa's ridgeline, which provides a natural fortress-like security.
- Combat in the Nafusa Mountains began in February 2011 as a popular resistance against the regime's security and political institutions in each town.
 - Zintan was the first city in the Nafusa Mountains to join the uprising against Qaddafi on February 18, followed by residents of Nalut on February 19. By February 26, the rebels controlled the towns from Nalut in the west to Gharyan in the east.
- For three months, loyalist forces used tanks and artillery situated on the low-lying territory to strike the towns while simultaneously cutting off any resupply.
 - Loyalist soldiers retook the city of Gharyan on February 25.
 - In mid-March, Qaddafi's troops attacked Zintan and Yafran, which were suffering from food shortages and electricity outages, but retreated between March 22 and March 27.
 - Despite surviving the most intensive assault yet by the regime, rebel-held towns in the mountains remained besieged through mid-April and experienced dire shortages of food, medicine, electricity, and other supplies.
 - The rebels overcame the regime's isolation strategy by seizing the border town of Wazin on April 21, opening a supply line from Tunisia and strengthening the entire Nafusa Mountain campaign.
 - The siege of the mountain cities continued throughout May with few changes in the battle lines. Government forces launched repeated assaults on Zintan and Wazin while regularly shelling rebel strongholds throughout the mountains.
- The four-month-long stalemate in the Nafusa Mountains ended in June when the rebels won several battles.
- NATO airstrikes in addition to multiple covert shipments of weapons from France and Qatar empowered the rebels' June offensives.
- These military gains were short-lived, however, as combat in July slid into a stalemate and the operational capacity of the Nafusa rebels appeared limited.
- The rebel offensive in the Nafusa Mountains in late July and early August drove toward Tripoli and deposed the regime.

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THE ASSAULT ON TRIPOLI

- Rebel forces launched an offensive into Tripoli and surrounding towns in late August.
- The Tripoli offensive had been planned several weeks beforehand at a meeting in Paris between Sarkozy and the Misrata Military Council on July 20.
- The subsequent rebel assault on Tripoli featured three separate opposition groups acting in close cooperation: rebels based out of the Nafusa Mountains, Misrata, and from within Tripoli.
- The rebel seizure of Bir al-Ghanam on August 6 allowed the Nafusa fighters to move north and attack Zawiyah on August 13. On August 20, the rebels controlled all of Zawiyah.
- The battle for Tripoli began on the night of August 20 when residents battled for control of the eastern neighborhoods of Souk al-Jumaa, Aradu, and Tajoura.
 - Rebels from Misrata launched an amphibious assault and aided the attack on Tajoura.
 - On August 21, Nafusa rebels advanced from their position in Zawiyah to take control of a regime military base located in the town of Mayah and open a second front in Tripoli's western neighborhoods.
 - Fierce clashes on August 22 tempered excitement over rebel gains as loyalist forces staunchly defended Qaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya compound and the pro-regime neighborhoods surrounding it. Rebel fighters and Tripoli residents streamed into and looted the Bab al-Aziziya compound on August 23.
 - The rebels expanded their control of Tripoli on August 24 and 25 as fighting continued in the city's southwestern neighborhoods. The last of Tripoli's southern neighborhoods fell on August 28, and much of the city returned to normal by the end of August.

THE FINAL STRONGHOLDS

- Opposition fighters seized control of Brega after loyalists withdrew following Saif al-Islam's reported arrest on August 22.
- The rebels then pushed west; by August 24, they had taken control of the port town of Ras Lanuf and arrived in Bin Jawad.
- On September 21, rebel forces seized most of Sebha except for a few holdout districts.
- Rebel forces initially attempted to negotiate with tribal elders in Sirte to reach a peaceful surrender, but they were unsuccessful. On September 9, rebel forces began advancing from the east, west, and south.
- The initial assault on Bani Walid also began on September 9.
- In Sirte, the rebels surrounded remaining pro-Qaddafi fighters in the 'Number 2' and 'Dollar' neighborhoods on the western side of the city by October 10.
- On October 16, rebel forces made unconfirmed claims that they had captured significant portions of Bani Walid.
- On October 20, rebel forces captured Qaddafi after engaging his convoy as it fled the city. Qaddafi was alive despite his wounds, but died before reaching the hospital in Misrata. The final pockets of resistance in Sirte soon collapsed, and rebel troops conducted searches for loyalists. They found and killed Qaddafi's son Mutassim and army chief Abu Bakr Younis.

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- On October 23, the NTC declared liberation, marking the beginning of the transitional timeline to elections, which was intended to take approximately a year and a half.
- Two days later, on October 25, the NTC buried Qaddafi, Mutassim, and Younis at a secret location in the desert after a modest Islamic ceremony.
- On October 21, NATO announced a preliminary decision to end operations on October 31. Six days later, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to end its mandate permitting intervention on October 31.
- NATO's mission in Libya formally ended on October 31, 2011.

CONCLUSION

- In the short-term, Libya's future is highly uncertain. The NTC must find a way to exert control over and unify the country in the face of a recovering economy, an unstable security situation, and fragile political alliances.
- The NTC faces challenges to securing its legitimacy. Many independent groups received their funding and supplies not from the NTC but from wealthy individuals, non-government organizations, or foreign countries.
- Preliminary reconstruction efforts in rebel-held areas and recently liberated territory are important to the Council's legitimacy and ability to project power, but the NTC must work with the remains of a corrupt, disorganized, and inefficient government. In the long term, the NTC must gain the capability to meet Libya's needs consistently.
- Libya's natural resource-driven economy seemed like it would be able to fund NTC initiatives quickly. However, the complete reliance of the state and the economy on oil revenues will create immediate and long-term challenges and could be a point of vulnerability for the new government.
 - Security conditions and financial factors pose problems to both inactive and active oil fields. The new government must attract foreign workers back to the country, especially to service the oil industry. The oil industry is also facing a setback because of the attempted reintegration of loyalist managers.
 - Even if the transitional government brings oil output back to pre-conflict levels in a timely fashion, the money it generates could bring problems of its own. Regionalism and tribalism could complicate the distribution of oil income.
- Libya's frozen assets could emerge as a critical source of money.
- The transitional government faces considerable internal security challenges:
 - Remaining loyalists could launch an insurgency, though Qaddafi's death may make this less likely.
 - Weapons either distributed by the regime or looted from its stockpiles saturate the country and pose a problem to the new government. The NTC has promised to secure the arms depots and pursue disarmament, but so far they have not been successful.
 - The NTC must also clear Libya of remaining ordnance, including multiple minefields loyalist troops laid in different regions of the country during the months of fighting.
 - Countries have recognized some of the major security problems the interim government must confront and have offered to help.
 - The NTC must bring the independent militias under a formal military force to fill the security vacuum in the country.

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- The lack of control over rebel militias stands to challenge NTC authority by derailing reconciliation efforts.
- There are also documented cases of opposition forces abusing human rights. While the NTC promised investigations into the claims of abuse, rebel leaders have not detailed their progress or any results from inquiries.
- Assuming the new government is able to address the economic and security challenges, it will still have to grapple with political issues to be successful.
 - Libya has deep political cleavages down regional and tribal lines, and rumors abound about a possible Islamist-secular divide.
- The new government will also have to balance reappointing those who served under the regime with gaining public support for the new positions.
- Finally, the ripple effects of Libya's revolution pose security risks and threaten the stability of surrounding countries.
 - Escaping regime members or loyalist fighters create diplomatic and security problems for other countries. The regime's vast weapons stockpiles are especially capable of disrupting security, and the international community recognizes this as a grave threat.
- Libya remains in a delicate situation that will require continued international engagement to heal its regional disputes, secure the country, form a functioning government, establish a security apparatus, and stem the spread of weaponry.

GLOSSARY

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Abdel Fattah Younis: A former member of the Qaddafi regime, Abdel Fattah Younis served as Qaddafi's interior minister before his defection on February 22, 2011. Younis served as the chief rebel military commander until his assassination by an unknown rebel brigade on July 28, 2011.

Ajdabiya: The town of Ajdabiya is located 95 miles southwest of Benghazi. Ajdabiya is a vital crossroads for Cyrenaica. Highways extend north to Benghazi, east to the port city of Tobruk, and southeast through oil-producing regions to the Kufra Oases. Ajdabiya was contested by rebels and loyalist fighters in mid-March, until NATO air support allowed rebels to retake the town on March 26, 2011.

Benghazi: Benghazi, the largest city in the Cyrenaica region, served as the center of power for the Sanusi Monarch prior to Qaddafi's 1969 coup. Demonstrations against the Qaddafi regime began in Benghazi on February 15. Security forces began to use lethal force against the protests on February 17, 2011, and rebels successfully seized the city on February 20, 2011. The National Transitional Council officially convened for the first time in Benghazi on March 5, 2011 and the city served as the NTC's capital throughout the rebellion.

Brega: Located 115 miles southwest of Benghazi, the town of Brega contains an oil, natural gas, and petrochemical refinery. Brega is Libya's fifth largest refinery and provides natural gas to Benghazi and Tripoli. Qaddafi forces retook Brega from rebel fighters on March 15, 2011, and rebel forces were unable to dislodge the loyalist defenders from the town until the loyalists withdrew on August 17, 2011.

Cyrenaica: Cyrenaica is one of the three distinct regions in Libya. Comprising the eastern half of the country, Cyrenaica and its capital city of Benghazi served as the seat of power for King Idris I under the Sanusi Monarchy. Due to the historical rivalry with the western region of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica was long a cradle of anti-Qaddafi sentiment and was the first area to rise up against Qaddafi.

Fezzan: Fezzan is the southwest region of Libya. Owing to its remoteness and sparse population, Fezzan has not featured prominently into the rivalry between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. Its largest city, Sabha, serves as the region's administrative center. Fezzan is dominated by the Maqarha tribe, one of Libya's largest tribes which staunchly supported Qaddafi.

Khamis Qaddafi and the Khamis Brigade: Khamis Qaddafi is one of the younger sons of Muammar Qaddafi and the commander of the elite 32nd Brigade (also known as the Khamis Brigade). The brigade was the primary paramilitary force deployed against the rebels in western Libya. Rebels have reported Khamis's death on several occasions, mostly recently stating he was killed in battle on August 29, 2011.

Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG): The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group is an extremist Islamic terrorist group formed in opposition to Qaddafi's regime in 1995. The LIFG was violently suppressed by the Qaddafi regime. The U.S. government designated the group as a terrorist organization in 2004 for its links with al-Qaeda. The LIFG became defunct by the end of the 1990s, though former LIFG fighters declared their support for the National Transitional Council. Abdul Hakim Belhaj, the leader of the Tripoli military council, was the overall commander of the LIFG.

Mahmood Jibril: Mahmood Jibril served as a senior economic advisor in the Qaddafi regime until his resignation in 2010. Jibril became the Chairman of the National Transitional Council's Executive Board on March 23, 2011 and was appointed the Prime Minister of the NTC. He has been the Council's main envoy to the international community.

Misrata: The port city of Misrata is located 125 miles southeast of Tripoli along the Mediterranean coast. It is Libya's third-largest city with 200,000 residents. Misrata joined the uprising on February 17, 2011. Loyalist forces besieged Misrata from early March to mid-May. The battle was marked by heavy urban combat and thousands of casualties. After the siege was lifted, Misratan rebels began advancing towards Tripoli in early August.

Muammar Qaddafi: Colonel Muammar Qaddafi seized control of Libya in a military coup on September 1, 1969. Qaddafi crafted the "Third Universal Theory," which combined elements of socialism, democracy, pan-Arabism, and Islam into an ideology outlined in his 1975 *Green Book*. Qaddafi dispatched paramilitary forces to quell the protests in February 2011; many soldiers and a number of government officials defected soon after, as the conflict escalated.

Mustafa Abdul Jalil: Mustafa Abdel Jalil served as Qaddafi's Minister of Justice from 2007 until his resignation on February 21, 2011. Jalil was a founding member of the National Transitional Council and was named chairman of the Council on February 26, 2011. Known for his reformist efforts while serving in the regime, Jalil secured significant domestic and international support as the leader of the NTC.

Mutassim Qaddafi: Mutassim is the fourth son of Muammar Qaddafi and served as his father's National Security Advisor since 2009. He and his older brother Saif al-Islam have long been considered the two most likely sons to replace their father, resulting in a heated rivalry between them. During the rebellion, Mutassim reportedly commanded the 9th Brigade, a paramilitary unit from Sirte that was heavily engaged against the rebels on the eastern front at Brega.

GLOSSARY

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Nafusa Mountains: The Nafusa Mountains is a highlands area that stretches from the town of Gharyan to the Tunisian border. The Nafusa Mountains are an intricate patchwork of small Arab and Berber tribes. The Berber population has traditionally been at odds with the Qaddafi regime. Many towns in the Nafusa joined the uprising in February and fought off loyalist attacks during the subsequent months. The Nafusa Mountain rebels coordinated an offensive against Tripoli with NATO in August and seized the capital.

National Transitional Council (NTC): The National Transitional Council is the official political body that represents the Libyan rebel movement. The NTC was established in Benghazi on February 27, 2011 and the NTC Executive Board was created on March 23, 2011. Based out of Benghazi, the NTC began gradually relocating to Tripoli after the fall of the capital city. Many of the Council's leaders are former Qaddafi regime officials, Libyan exiles, and eastern Libya politicians.

Operation Odyssey Dawn: Operation Odyssey Dawn was the name of the U.S. military operation conducted in Libya from March 19 to March 31, 2011 to enforce UNSCR 1973. It was a joint air and sea operation to enforce a no-fly zone, maritime arms embargo and protect civilians on the ground by bombing regime forces. After March 31, the United States stepped down from its leadership role and contributed military assets to the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector.

Operation Unified Protector: Operation Unified Protector is the name of the NATO-led mission to enforce UNSCR 1973 began on March 23, 2011 when the alliance took responsibility for enforcing an arms embargo on Libya of the arms embargo. On March 31, 2011, NATO took full responsibility for the air campaign over Libya.

Ras Lanuf: The coastal town or Ras Lanuf is situated 126 miles southeast of Sirte and contains Libya's largest oil refinery. Rebel forces seized Ras Lanuf in early March, though a loyalist counterattack drove the rebels from the town on March 11, 2011. Following the rebel assault on Brega, rebel fighters attacked and captured Ras Lanuf on August 23, 2011.

Saif al-Islam Qaddafi: The second son of Muammar Qaddafi, Saif al-Islam was the heir apparent to his father. Prior to the rebellion, Saif spearheaded political and economic initiatives and was regarded as a reformer. Throughout the conflict, Saif was the most visible member of the Qaddafi family. While he initially tried to appease protesters with promises of reform, he publicly defended the regime's brutal crackdown on demonstrators as the conflict escalated. He evaded capture by rebel forces following the fall of Tripoli.

Sirte: The city of Sirte is located in central Libya and straddles the boundary between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. Sirte is the hometown of Muammar Qaddafi and a stronghold of the Qadadfa tribe. During Qaddafi's rule, he developed Sirte into a major administrative center and military garrison. The city's heavily defended garrison has remained loyal to Qaddafi throughout the war. As of September 2011, loyalists troops continued to holdout in Sirte.

Tripoli: The capital of Libya, Tripoli is located on the western coastline and is the country's largest city with 1.8 million residents. Initial protests in the capital were suppressed by mid-March. The seat of power for the Qaddafi regime, NATO aircraft bombed Tripoli more frequently than anywhere else during the war. The Nafusa Mountain rebels began advancing towards Tripoli in early August in coordination with others inside the city. Qaddafi's compound was captured by the rebels on August 24, 2011, and rebel commanders reported the city was secure on August 28, 2011.

Tripolitania: Tripolitania is the northwest region of Libya. It is the most populated region of Libya, with the capital city of Tripoli and major cities such as Misrata and Zawiyah. that includes the capital city of Tripoli. The region has an historic rivalry with Cyrenaica in the east.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1970: The UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1970 on February 26, 2011. It established an arms embargo, imposed a travel ban on regime officials, and compelled member states to freeze the financial assets of six regime figures and members of the Qaddafi family. It also granted the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over all war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Libya after February 15, 2011.

UNSCR 1973: The UN Security Council authorized UNSCR 1973 on March 17, 2011. It granted member states the authority to use "all necessary measures" to protect Libyan civilians threatened by Libyan military forces and enforce a no-fly zone and arms embargo on Libya.

Zawiyah: The city of Zawiyah is located 30 miles west of Tripoli and contains Libya's second largest oil refinery. Anti-Qaddafi forces drove loyalist troops from the city on February 20, 2011, though regime forces retook Zawiyah on March 11, 2011. Many of Zawiyah fighters subsequently fled and joined the rebellion in the Nafusa Mountains to the south. The rebels attacked Zawiyah in an offensive coordinated with NATO on August 13, 2011, finally recapturing the city on August 20, 2011 and securing a route to Tripoli.

Zintan: Located 85 miles southwest of Tripoli, the town of Zintan is the largest city in the Nafusa Mountains. Zintan joined the uprising in mid-February, and rebel forces repulsed loyalist attacks from February through May. NATO airstrikes enabled the Zintan rebels to break through loyalist lines on June 2, and rebel fighters seized numerous towns in the Nafusa Mountains in the following weeks.



THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

THE TIDE TURNS

PART 4

By Anthony Bell, Spencer Butts, and David Witter

This four-part series provides a detailed narrative of the war in Libya and seeks to explain the underlying dynamics behind the conflict for policymakers contemplating policies regarding Libya's future. Part One: Roots of Rebellion details Libya's political history, human terrain, economy, and the Qaddafi regime's unique political and military structures. It also addresses the early stages of the conflict in February 2011, beginning with the protests in Benghazi that triggered the rebellion, the formation of the National Transitional Council. The paper also details the spread of unrest to western Libya and the regime's crackdowns in Tripoli and Zawiyah. Part Two: Escalation and Intervention discusses the international reaction to the war and the process that led to the U.S. and allied military intervention in March. This section explains the U.S.-led Operation Odyssey Dawn and the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector. Part Three: Stalemate and Siege documents the ebb of fighting in eastern Libya, the pinnacle battle of Misrata, and the turmoil within the rebel ranks. This section concludes with the extensive efforts to break the siege of Misrata. Part Four: The Tide Turns documents the fighting in the Nafusa Mountains of western Libya that culminated in the rebel seizure of Tripoli in August. This final installment in the series concludes with discussion of the most pressing issues facing Libya in the aftermath of the regime's collapse.

I. INTRODUCTION

This report is the fourth installation of a four-part series on the revolution in Libya. *Part Four: The Tide Turns* details the final campaigns of the conflict up to the country's liberation and examines the obstacles facing the new government. The report begins by analyzing the fighting in Libya's western Nafusa Mountains, culminating in the rebels' breakout. Next, it documents the taking of Tripoli and its implications for the revolution. The third section follows the fall of the final regime strongholds. It details NATO's responses to the developments, and lays out the transitional timeline. Lastly, the report looks ahead at the problems threatening Libya's peaceful transition and the steps the international community has taken.

II. THE NAFUSA MOUNTAINS CAMPAIGN

The Nafusa Mountains are located in western Tripolitania just south of the Jafara Plain, a flat and densely populated area that stretches west of Tripoli along the Mediterranean coast to the Tunisian border. The Jafara Plain reaches about fifty miles inland before transitioning to the northern face of the Nafusa Mountains, an escarpment of low-lying mountains that stretch approximately 150 miles from east to west, extending from the Tunisian border to the city of Gharyan, located fifty miles south of Tripoli. In the north, the Nafusa Mountains rise sharply from the flat Jafara Plain to an elevation of 1,000 to 2,000 feet, while the southern

face of the Nafusa transitions seamlessly into the highlands of the Tripolitanian Plateau.

The Nafusa Mountains are home to Libya's Berber population, also known as the Amazigh, as well as a minority of Arabs. The Berbers are the indigenous inhabitants of Libya who pre-date the Arab invasion of North Africa in the eleventh-century. While many Libyans are of mixed Arab-Berber descent, there remains a distinctive Berber ethno-linguistic group that represents Libya's most significant minority, comprising approximately five percent of the population.¹ The Berber's native language is Amazigh rather than Arabic. Many Berbers practice Ibadism, a distinct branch of Islam from Sunni and Shia, which further differentiates them from the principally Sunni nation. The population centers in the Nafusa are scattered across the mountains, ranging from larger cities such as Gharyan, Zintan, Yafran, Nalut and Jadu to dozens of small villages. Most of the settlements are set atop the Nafusa's imposing ridgeline, which provides a natural fortress-like security that historically has protected them from rival tribes and invaders.² The two primary roads in the Nafusa Mountains run east to west on opposite sides of the range. The low-lying road, which provides access to the Jafara Plain, shadows the ridgeline to the north and connects the small settlements at the foot of the mountains. The high road runs atop the plateau, linking the mountain towns from the south.

While predominately Berber, the communities of the Nafusa Mountains are an intricate patchwork of Berber, Arab, and mixed tribes. Despite a long history of intertribal warfare in the Nafusa, factionalism is not split solely along Arab-Berber due to the number of mixed tribes and alliances.³ Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the longstanding ethnic tensions between the Berber and Arab communities.⁴ The larger Arab tribes in the Nafusa are the Mashashiya, the Awlad Busaif, the Nawail, the Rujban, and the Riyyana—at least several of which Qaddafi has cultivated as allies.⁵ The large Zintan tribe, one of the most prominent tribes in the rebellion, is centered on the town of Zintan and has two distinctive Arab and Berber sub-tribes.⁶ The Berber Ait Willoul tribe dominates the coastal city of Zuwarah on the northern Jafara Plain, where the regime crushed the rebels in March.⁷ Many of the Berber tribes, such as the Yafran, the Jadu, the Fassatu, the Kabaw, and the Haraba, joined the rebellion in February.⁸

The Berbers of the Nafusa and the Qaddafi regime have long been at odds. The Berbers were supporters of King Idris, who courted them in order to balance his relatively weak influence against the oppositional tribes and elite of Tripolitania. Qaddafi was therefore suspicious of them after his rise to power. He counted on the support of the Arab tribes in Tripolitania for his political base and adopted a pan-Arab nationalist ideology. For nearly four decades, Qaddafi pursued a policy of Arabization, contending that the Berber identity was a colonial invention and that Libya was a purely Arab state.⁹ The regime denied the existence of Berbers while simultaneously discriminating against them with other repressive policies, including banning the use of the Amazigh language.¹⁰ Libyans from the Nafusa region have at times retaliated against the regime; several of the army officers who participated in the 1993 assassination attempt on Qaddafi were from the Zintan tribe.¹¹

Combat in the Nafusa Mountains began in February as a popular resistance against the regime's security and political institutions in each town. These uprisings occurred simultaneously with rebellions elsewhere in Libya but were initially not coordinated with the NTC. As protests transitioned to armed combat, the mountaintop locations of the Nafusa cities became a double-edge sword. Though it proved extremely difficult for the regime's ground forces to assault the cities, the lack of immediately available food and humanitarian supplies made the mountainous redoubts equally vulnerable to siege. For three months,

loyalist forces used tanks and artillery situated on the low-lying territory to strike the towns while simultaneously cutting off any resupply. The rebels were unable to turn the tide until June after NATO airstrikes weakened regime positions and after multiple covert shipments of weapons from France and Qatar empowered opposition fighters to go on the offensive. Two subsequent rebel offensives in late July and early August built upon these gains as combat slowly moved off the mountain into the Jafara Plain.

Zintan, with a population of approximately twenty-five thousand, was the first city in the Nafusa Mountains to join the uprising against Qaddafi.¹² Government forces traveled to Zintan on February 18 to recruit the city's tribesmen to help put down the eastern rebellion.¹³ Offended by the proposal, protestors marched to the center of the town, where they set fire to security and government offices over the next three days.¹⁴ The regime initially attempted to end the demonstrations by sending top regime officials to offer families money for their allegiance. The failure of this

approach led to more aggressive measures, including assaulting demonstrators and cutting off the town's water and electricity.¹⁵ Residents of Nalut, a city of thirty thousand roughly seventy miles west of Zintan, demonstrated in a similar fashion on February 19 and quickly drove out the local security forces.

Local police and army defections contributed to the rapid retreat of Qaddafi forces across the Nafusa.¹⁶ Protestors seized weapons from a government weapons depot

in the town of Gharyan, prompting the regime to bomb other weapon storage facilities throughout the mountains. By February 26, the rebels controlled towns ranging from Nalut in the west to Gharyan in the east and began forming political committees to organize their opposition.¹⁷

Qaddafi's forces quickly launched a counteroffensive that sought to isolate each population center. Loyalist tanks and artillery shelled the towns from the low road and used ground attacks to secure flanking positions. One of the regime's primary targets was Zintan. It became the focal point of the resistance in the Nafusa and later hosted the rebels' regional command.¹⁸ The regime failed to retake Zintan in an attack on February 28, but it was able to lay siege to it and many of the other restive towns by positioning troops along the low road and seizing control of key points on either side of mountain range.¹⁹ Posing as defectors, loyalist soldiers retook the city of Gharyan on February 25 after protestors had seized it three days earlier.²⁰ Gharyan

The Berbers of the Nafusa and the Qaddafi regime have long been at odds.

is the largest population center in the Nafusa Mountains and is strategically located on the mountain's eastern edge, positioned along a major highway that extends fifty miles north to Tripoli. The government's control of Gharyan prevented the rebels from advancing directly up the highway to Tripoli and gave government forces an important base of operations.²¹ The loss of Gharyan left the rebels' easternmost position at the small town of Kiklah, about twenty miles southwest.²² The regime also deployed troops to the primary border crossing with Tunisia (known as the Wazin-Dehiba border crossing) on March 2, preventing large quantities of supplies from flowing to rebel fighters from Tunisia.²³

Loyalist forces tightened the siege through March, shelling the western city of Nalut from the nearby town of Ghazaya while repeatedly assaulting Zintan and Yafran with tanks and other armored vehicles in an attempt to cut the towns off from each other.²⁴ Zintan and Yafran experienced shortages of foodstuffs and intermittent electricity, as well as regular artillery and rocket barrages.²⁵ In mid-March, Qaddafi's troops pressed their advantage and launched offensives on both towns. Government tanks and armored vehicles attacked Zintan from the north and south on March 16 and completely encircled the town; regime forces moved to within two miles of the city's outskirts by March 19.²⁶ A second loyalist assault – complete with armored reinforcements – struck Zintan and Yafran several days later, though neither force could push into the towns.²⁷ Loyalist forces halted their assault and retreated between March 22 and March 27; the battle's dynamics were unclear, but there are reports that the rebels turned back the assault with tanks.²⁸ NATO conducted airstrikes on March 27, but rebels denied that coalition airpower helped turn the tide of battle at Zintan and Yafran.²⁹

Despite surviving the most intensive assault yet by the regime, rebel-held towns in the mountains remained besieged through mid-April and experienced dire shortages of food, medicine, electricity, and other supplies.³⁰ Regime forces positioned along the low road continued to shell the towns while moving along the road to cut off Zintan from Yafran and the Tunisian border crossing.³¹ The rebels overcame this isolation strategy by seizing Wazin, a border town, on April 21, opening a supply line from Tunisia.³² This newfound supply route strengthened the entire Nafusa Mountain campaign, providing supplies to cities along the rebel-controlled mountain road (most notably Zintan and Yafran). The significance of this was not lost on the regime forces. Over the course of the next week, loyalist soldiers launched a broad offensive in an attempt to overwhelm the rebels before they could resupply

themselves from the newly opened border crossing.³³

The siege of the mountain cities continued throughout May with few changes in the battle lines. Government forces launched repeated assaults on Zintan and Wazin while regularly shelling rebel strongholds throughout the mountains. Though the rebels did not cede ground, they were unable to push beyond the existing battle lines. By the end of the month, the rebels controlled Zintan, Yafran, Wazin, Nalut, and Kiklah, but they were unable to drive Qaddafi's forces from their positions along the low-lying foothills and low road. Minimal NATO bombing across the Nafusa Mountains limited the rebels' ability to break the siege. Airstrikes during this early period were irregular and focused entirely on loyalist forces around Zintan and the southern town of Mizdah.³⁴ The frequency with which NATO bombed weapons storage facilities near Mizdah indicate it was a major supply center for regime forces.³⁵

The four-month-long stalemate in the Nafusa Mountains ended in June when the rebels won several battles. On June 2, Zintan-based rebels pushed Qaddafi's forces out of two low-lying towns to the north, Shakshuk and Qasr al Haj, making Zintan less vulnerable to the regime's bombardment.³⁶ This newfound breathing room allowed the rebels to launch an offensive eastward towards Yafran, which had remained under constant attack from loyalist forces. The town was a key waypoint on the march towards the strategically important loyalist stronghold of Gharyan. On June 15, rebel forces from Zintan took three villages while moving east to a point six miles outside of Yafran. This push dovetailed with rebel victories in both Yafran and Kiklah, where NATO airstrikes supported rebel offensives that drove government troops further away from the cities.³⁷ They also took control of a sprawling arms depot fifteen miles south of Zintan in the town of Gha'a. This seizure was significant because it led to the discovery of information concerning the size of the regime's stockpile of shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (SAMs).³⁸

The success of the rebels' June offensive is due largely to increased military support from NATO and its allies. The NATO air campaign in the Nafusa Mountains in May and June. Airstrikes in May and June struck targets with greater consistency and in larger numbers in the towns of Yafran, Nalut, Gharyan, and Zintan.³⁹ Increased NATO airstrikes inhibited the regime's ability to use tanks, artillery pieces, and rocket launchers to strike rebel positions effectively. These targets were also more vulnerable in the plains' open terrain as compared to the urban battlefields elsewhere in the Libyan theater.

France and Qatar's shipment of weapons to opposition fighters in the Nafusa Mountains prior to the June offensive also contributed to the rebels' success. French government officials revealed in late June that they had parachuted weapons into the region earlier that month. These shipments reportedly included small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and MILAN anti-tank weapons.⁴⁰ Qatar's weapons were in place as early as late May, when reporters in Zintan saw mortars and ammunition in cases bearing Qatari labels.⁴¹ Qatari cargo aircraft flew these weapons to Benghazi, which the rebels then transported to the militias in the Nafusa Mountains either through Tunisia or, as of July, directly from Benghazi to the Rhabat airstrip by private airline.⁴² In early July, the regime showed off approximately one hundred Belgian FN assault rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition that it claimed to have taken two rebel boats captured off the coast of Janzour, a town about ten miles west of Tripoli.⁴³ While the intended destination of these arms cannot be determined definitively, the shipment indicates that Qatar continued to support the rebels and serve as an intermediary for weapons from the West.

The Nafusa rebels followed their June offensive with the seizure of Qawalish, a small town on the eastern side of the Nafusa Mountains, on July 6.⁴⁴ Qawalish was important because of its proximity to Gharyan's northbound highway. A rebel victory in Gharyan would not only pave the way for a push into the capitol, but it would also cut off Tripoli from a major support base at the southern end of the highway near Sabha. Regime forces were strongly entrenched in Gharyan, as it was an obvious defensive position against a possible attack from the restive mountain region and the rebels had not mounted an offensive against it. Since late June, NATO airstrikes had increasingly targeted Gharyan, destroying tanks, military compounds, and anti-aircraft weapons.

These military gains were short-lived, however, as combat in July slid into a stalemate and the operational capacity of the Nafusa rebels appeared limited. The absence of a rebel assault on Gharyan seemed to indicate that the rebels in the Nafusa Mountains were unwilling or unable to conduct operations that did not focus on responding to an immediate threat to their security. Most battles in the Nafusa centered on individual towns, and the rebel fighters who participated were local men fighting for their homes. The rebel focus on narrow objectives was born out by reports that individual groups of fighters hoarded weapons that they had captured from loyalists or received from Qatar and France.⁴⁵ Some Nafusa rebels accused the

Zintan-based fighters of not distributing the Qatari and French weapons.⁴⁶

Pre-existing tribal animosities led to the ransacking of Qawalish on July 6 and challenged the Nafusa rebels' ability to prioritize national objectives over local interests. Fighters from the Zintan tribe and other allied tribes pillaged Qawalish and three other nearby villages, targeting the local Mashashiya tribe. The Mashashiya's support for the regime fostered the intertribal animosity. The regime largely disenfranchised the Zintan and other Arab/Berber tribes further west while the Mashashiya have historically enjoyed Qaddafi's largesse. Regime support for the Mashashiya subsequently became an asset in resolving disputes over the longstanding land ownership conflicts between the Mashashiya and the Zintan. Zintan elders put these differences aside and tried to negotiate with the Mashashiya prior to the July assault to gain their support, but the Mashashiya refused and allowed the regime to stage military assets in their villages.⁴⁷ This capacity for intertribal warfare, combined with the pattern of limited military objectives, seemed to discourage the possibility that the Nafusa rebels could meaningfully contribute to overthrowing the regime.

Finally, a chain of command that appeared to be more aspirational than functional limited the rebels' operational capabilities. Colonel Mokhtar Milad Fernana, a regime commander who defected in February, was the NTC's commander in the mountains.⁴⁸ In March, military councils throughout the Nafusa Mountains elected Fernana to be the region's military leader and liaison to the NTC.⁴⁹ The degree to which Fernana guided rebel operations in the mountains is unclear. He claimed to have the ability to call in NATO airstrikes through NTC intermediaries in Benghazi, but he lacked a direct link to the alliance as of early July.⁵⁰ There are reports that other military officers who defected from the regime did not assume effective leadership and in some cases did not participate at all in the fighting.⁵¹ Military councils in the major cities of each region of the Nafusa coordinated day-to-day military operations, though the number of councils and the extent of their control are unclear. It is likely that they operated in similar ways to those councils in Nalut and Zintan, which reportedly partnered with surrounding villages to execute larger military operations.⁵²

Yet the rebel offensive in the Nafusa Mountains in late July and early August dramatically overcame these apparent limitations when they drove toward Tripoli and deposed the regime. After months of battles featuring narrowly focused objectives and limited capabilities, opposition

fighters demonstrated newfound coordination and a focus on strategic, rather than tactical, objectives. It is likely that the U.S. and European partners gave more assistance to these rebel militias during this time. These Nafusa offensives represented the turning point of Operation Unified Protector.

After several hours of NATO airstrikes on the morning of July 28, several hundred Naluti rebels pushed into the towns of Ghazaya and Takut in the foothills surrounding Nalut.⁵³ The offensive, which would later attack the towns of Tiji and al-Jawsh, had two objectives: to drive regime artillery and armor beyond the point where they could shell Nalut and to secure the main road that extends east from the Tunisian border.⁵⁴ Control of the low-lying road and the towns of Takut, Tiji, and al-Jawsh would ensure a supply line from the Tunisian border to the rebel-held villages of Shakshuk and Qasr al-Haj. The rebels drove loyalist forces from Ghazaya and Takut, but they were initially unable to seize Tiji and al-Jawsh and retreated to the towns' outskirts.⁵⁵ Though the offensive was not a total success, the rebels secured the supply line from Tunisia to Nalut. The objectives of the offensive remained focused on immediate security in the mountains, but the large size of the rebel force and the regional scale of the assault marked a significant shift in the Nafusa campaign.

The second offensive occurred on August 6 when hundreds of rebel fighters seized the small town of Bir al-Ghanam, located fifteen miles north of Yafran along the low-lying road that reaches into Tripoli.⁵⁶ The rebels' decision to take Bir al-Ghanam stemmed from a desire to threaten the regime's hold on Tripoli and its surrounding area, and fighters pledged to march north across the Jafara Plain after seizing Bir al-Ghanam towards the regime-held towns of Zawiyah or Surman.⁵⁷ The battle at Bir al-Ghanam also reflected an apparently newfound willingness to pursue a goal with national implications in place of one that solely affected security in the mountains. The rebels chose not to engage the loyalist forces entrenched in Gharyan—a more immediate threat to the Nafusa rebels—whose seizure would have accomplished similar strategic objectives.⁵⁸ While part of the reason the rebels attacked Bir al-Ghanam instead of Gharyan may have been because it would be an easier fight, it still demonstrated a willingness to expand their campaign out of the mountains.

Though the rebels' inability to project force out of the mountains initially limited the Nafusa campaign's significance, the rebels based out of Bir al-Ghanam advanced north and attacked regime forces in Zawiyah on August 13. After a six-day battle for the city, these rebels spearheaded an eastward offensive on August 20 for the climactic battle of Tripoli.

III. THE ASSAULT ON TRIPOLI (AUGUST 2011)

The five-month conflict reached a dramatic climax in late August when rebel forces launched an offensive into Tripoli and surrounding towns. Within several days, an underground resistance movement inside Tripoli—aided by fighters from the Nafusa Mountains and Misrata—drove out most of the regime's security forces. Concurrent rebel offensives throughout Tripolitania successfully seized almost every major town.

The Tripoli offensive had been planned several weeks beforehand. Members of the Misrata Military Council reportedly proposed a two-pronged assault on Tripoli during a July 20 meeting in Paris with Sarkozy. The plan required rebel fighters based out of Misrata and the Nafusa Mountains to attack the capital from its eastern and western approaches.⁵⁹ The Misratan rebels also asked the international coalition for further military assistance to launch the assault.

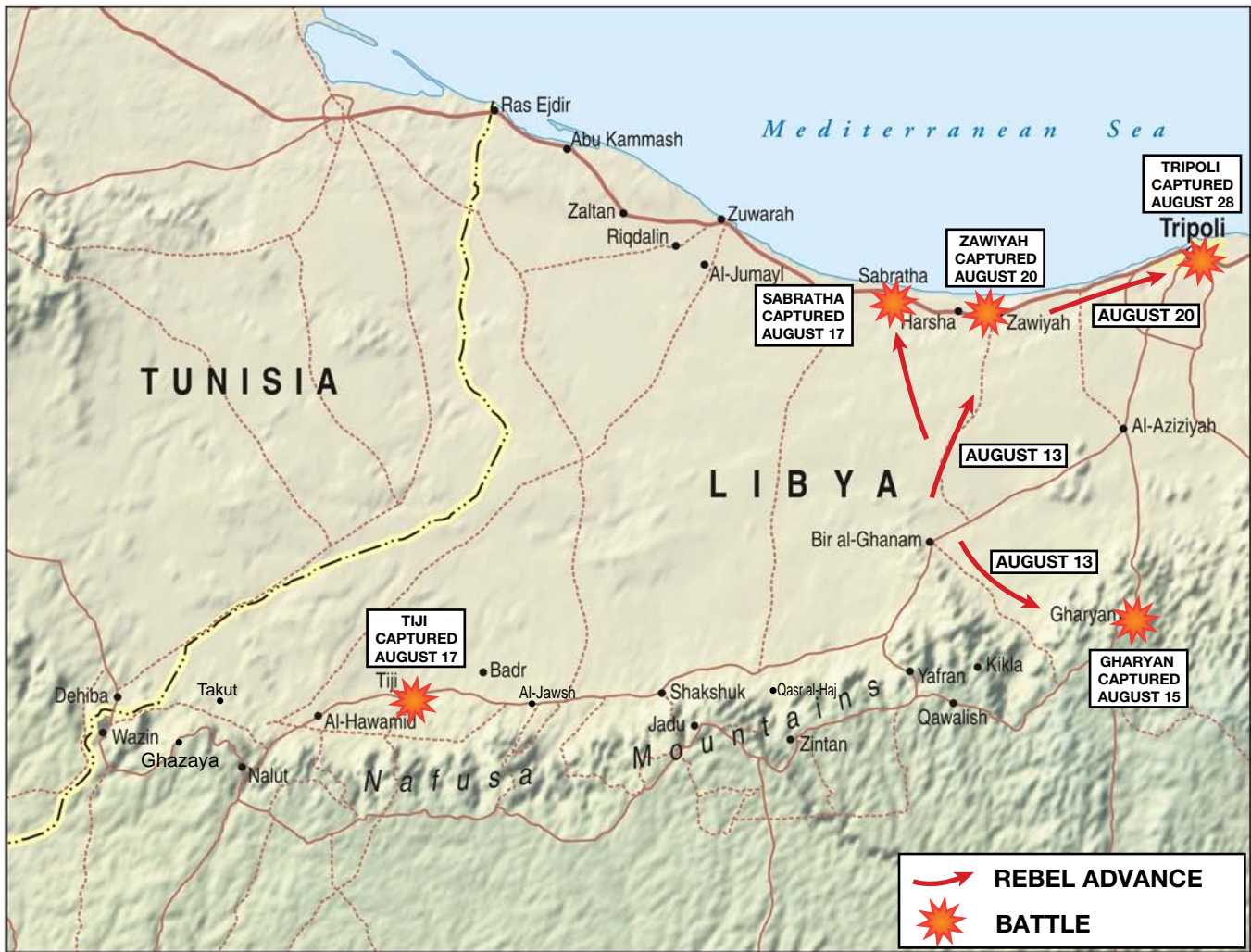
During the following weeks, British, French, and Qatari special operations forces in Libya provided weapons, fuel, food, and medicine to rebels in

Tripolitania.⁶⁰ Coalition military advisors helped plan the assault using satellite imagery of loyalist positions and an increasing amount of U.S. intelligence provided after a U.S. decision in early July to remove its limitations on intelligence sharing. The collected information indicated that the regime's command structure, supply capabilities, and morale had deteriorated considerably.⁶¹ This weakened state would provide the opportunity to launch the August offensive.

NATO also stepped up its aerial bombing campaign to facilitate the rebels' advance towards Tripoli. The U.S. participated in these intensified bombing sorties despite the Obama administration's previous claims that the American military was not engaged in major hostilities

The five-month conflict reached a dramatic climax in late August when rebel forces launched an offensive into Tripoli and surrounding towns.

THE ASSAULT ON TRIPOLI



as part of Operation Unified Protector. The Department of Defense stated that the U.S. conducted thirty-eight airstrikes between August 10 and August 22, averaging around three each day. This was roughly double the pace of U.S. strikes conducted between April 1 and August 10.⁶² Additionally, six armed U.S. Predator drones flew over the capital and its environs for several weeks prior to the assault, identifying concealed regime assets and striking clear targets.⁶³ Drones conducted seventeen strikes in Libya during the aforementioned period.⁶⁴

The subsequent rebel assault on Tripoli built off these bombardments and featured three separate opposition groups acting in close cooperation. This coalition included rebels based out of the Nafusa Mountains, Misrata, and from within Tripoli. The Nafusa and Misrata rebels supported a local uprising that was scheduled to begin after evening prayers on August 20. This date also had religious significance, as it marked the Prophet Mohammad's liberation of the holy Muslim city of Mecca.⁶⁵

The key to the assault was the progress made by the Nafusa rebels in prior weeks. The rebel seizure of Bir al-Ghanam on August 6 allowed the Nafusa fighters to move north and attack Zawayah. This city—just thirty miles from the capital—hosted the last oil refinery under regime control and sat astride a highway over which supplies moved from Tunisia into Tripoli. The regime had brutally suppressed a major uprising in Zawayah in late February, and the city's history of opposition made it an ideal springboard for the Nafusa rebels' ensuing attack on Tripoli.

The Nafusa rebels, having encountered no resistance from regime forces as they moved north from Bir al-Ghanam, attacked Zawayah on August 13.⁶⁶ NATO airstrikes on loyalist armor cleared the way for opposition fighters to seize the city's western neighborhoods on August 14, but loyalist shelling and sniping prevented further gains. Rebels managed to push into the refinery facility on August 17 and captured it the following day.⁶⁷ Many loyalist soldiers fled the city shortly thereafter, but they

left a rearguard that defended the city center from rebel advances.⁶⁸ The rearguard—ensconced in tall buildings that overlooked the city center—finally succumbed to the rebel assault on August 20. Finally, the rebels controlled all of Zawiyah.⁶⁹

The Qaddafi regime recognized that rebel control of Zawiyah presented an immediate threat to Tripoli and tried to send reinforcements to the city on August 20. This proved to be an ill-fated decision. NATO warplanes quickly bombed the loyalist convoy and forced it to retreat six miles east of Zawiyah.⁷⁰ More importantly, this realignment drew loyalist forces away from Tripoli, where an underground resistance movement launched the climactic uprising later that evening.

The battle for Tripoli began on the night of August 20 after the conclusion of evening prayers. The prayers reportedly signaled the start of the attack.⁷¹ Tripoli residents, bearing weapons that the rebels had smuggled into the city during previous weeks, battled for control of the eastern neighborhoods of Souk al-Jumaa, Aradu, and Tajoura.⁷² Approximately 150 rebels traveled by boat from Misrata, launched an amphibious assault, and aided the attack on Tajoura.⁷³ This operation supported a rebel attack on loyalist forces entrenched within Mitiga airport.⁷⁴

The Misratan rebels may have launched this sea-born operation because they were unable to move across land to Tripoli quickly. On August 19, Misratan rebels fought a bloody street battle with loyalist forces in Zlitan and suffered 180 casualties.⁷⁵ Rebels near Zlitan claimed that there were “heavy numbers of Gaddafi troops inside.” Although combat the following day forced a loyalist retreat from Zlitan, the city of al-Khums still stood between the Misratan rebels and Tripoli.⁷⁶ The Misratan rebels may have decided that an overland advance would not reach Tripoli in time to support the Nafusa rebels’ attack on western Tripoli and instead opted for the boat assault.

On August 21, Nafusa rebels advanced from their position in Zawiyah to open a second front in Tripoli’s western neighborhoods. Before arriving in the capitol, however, the rebels had to take control of a regime military base located in the town of Mayah.⁷⁷ The base, seventeen miles west of Tripoli, housed elements of the Khamis Brigade and was part of the so-called “ring of steel” defensive perimeter around the capital.⁷⁸ Despite the deterrent battalion’s vaunted reputation, few loyalist soldiers were still defending the base and it fell to the Nafusa rebels later that day.⁷⁹ By evening, the rebel convoy pushed through western Tripoli and joined a euphoric crowd that had

gathered in the city center, known as the Green Square.⁸⁰

Adding to this celebration were initial reports that rebel forces had captured three of Qaddafi’s sons: Saif al-Islam, Saadi, and Mohammed.⁸¹ The International Criminal Court confirmed Saif al-Islam’s capture on August 21, claiming that they were negotiating with NTC to secure his transfer.⁸² The whereabouts of Saif al-Islam’s father, however, were unknown; the only sign of Qaddafi was an audio message released to local media that day urging Tripoli residents to fight the rebels.⁸³

Fierce clashes on August 22 tempered excitement over rebel gains as loyalist forces staunchly defended Qaddafi’s Bab al-Aziziya compound and the pro-regime neighborhoods surrounding it. After opposition fighters seized a female police academy and the state television broadcasting building, they were poised to strike the dictator’s nearby compound.⁸⁴ However, loyalist tanks emerged from the compound and fired on rebel positions, thwarting the attack. Regime security forces also appeared to control the city’s waterfront area and Abu Salim district.⁸⁵ Abu Salim, characterized as a Warfalla neighborhood supportive of the regime, is a densely populated slum located south of Qaddafi’s compound.⁸⁶

The rebels were further discouraged when Saif al-Islam emerged from a loyalist convoy on the evening of August 22 to hold a press conference with foreign journalists at the luxurious Rixos Hotel.⁸⁷ He denied rumors of his capture and led reporters on a tour of loyalist-controlled territory in Abu Salim and the nearby the Bab al-Aziziya compound.⁸⁸ Reports that Saif al-Islam’s brothers eluded capture compounded frustration stemming from his public appearance. Mohammed escaped from house arrest, while Saadi appeared not to have avoided arrest entirely.⁸⁹

The setbacks of August 22 provided only temporary respite for regime forces, as the rebels seized Bab al-Aziziya the next day. Following a six-hour firefight, rebel fighters and Tripoli residents streamed into the dictator’s compound on August 23.⁹⁰ Libyans vandalized and looted the complex, and many left carrying newly procured weapons.⁹¹ Despite the capture of a major symbol of the regime, the battle for Tripoli was not over. Qaddafi and his sons were not in the compound, but the dictator claimed to still be in Tripoli during a phone call later that day to World Chess Federation President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov.⁹² Additionally, combat continued in the Abu Salim and Hadba districts.⁹³

The rebels expanded their control of Tripoli on August 24 and 25 as fighting continued in the city’s southwestern

neighborhoods Abu Salim and Hadba. A rebel offensive in Abu Salim secured an infamous prison and the regime's intelligence building, leading to the release of hundreds of political prisoners. Among these prisoners were a few hundred former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an Islamic militant group that launched attacks against Qaddafi's regime in the 1990s.⁹⁴ The U.S. government designated the LIFG as an international terrorist group in 2004 for having links to al-Qaeda, but by then the group appeared to be largely defunct. At the time of this publication, the activities or intentions of these former prisoners is unknown.

The last of Tripoli's southern neighborhoods fell on August 28, and much of the city returned to normal by the end of August.⁹⁵ Some grocery stores reopened, and residents came back out in public.⁹⁶ Neighborhood watch groups helped prevent widespread looting. Access to basic services, however, remained limited. Tripoli residents faced shortages of electricity, running water, fresh produce, and gasoline.

IV. THE FINAL STRONGHOLDS

Tripoli's growing stability did not signal the conflict's conclusion, as clashes continued in Cyrenaica. Even after Tripoli fell, the regime maintained control over Sirte, Bani Walid, and the Sabha region. Rebel forces seized new ground as they advanced towards the remaining regime strongholds in Sirte. Opposition fighters seized control of Brega after loyalists withdrew following Saif al-Islam's reported arrest on August 22.⁹⁷ The rebels then pushed west; by August 24, they had taken control of the port town of Ras Lanuf and arrived in Bin Jawad.⁹⁸ The advance ended in Bin Jawad, however, when a surprise attack halted the rebels entering the town.⁹⁹ This marked the second time during the conflict that regime forces ambushed rebels at Bin Jawad, and in both cases rebels claimed that local residents aided the loyalist attacks.¹⁰⁰ The residents' complicity may indicate that they share a tribal allegiance with the Sirte-based Qadafha tribe.

On September 21, rebel forces seized most of Sabha except for a few holdout districts.¹⁰¹ A day later, opposition troops announced that they had defeated the final loyalist pockets in Sabha and liberated the main towns of the al-Jufra oasis—Hun, Waddan, and Sokna—effectively ending organized resistance in the south.¹⁰² The rebels then embarked

on a campaign to secure the area, a task the regime had complicated by its massive weapons distribution efforts. Several pro-Qaddafi towns refused to disarm, but they did not have significant amounts of manpower to mount anything more than a token resistance.

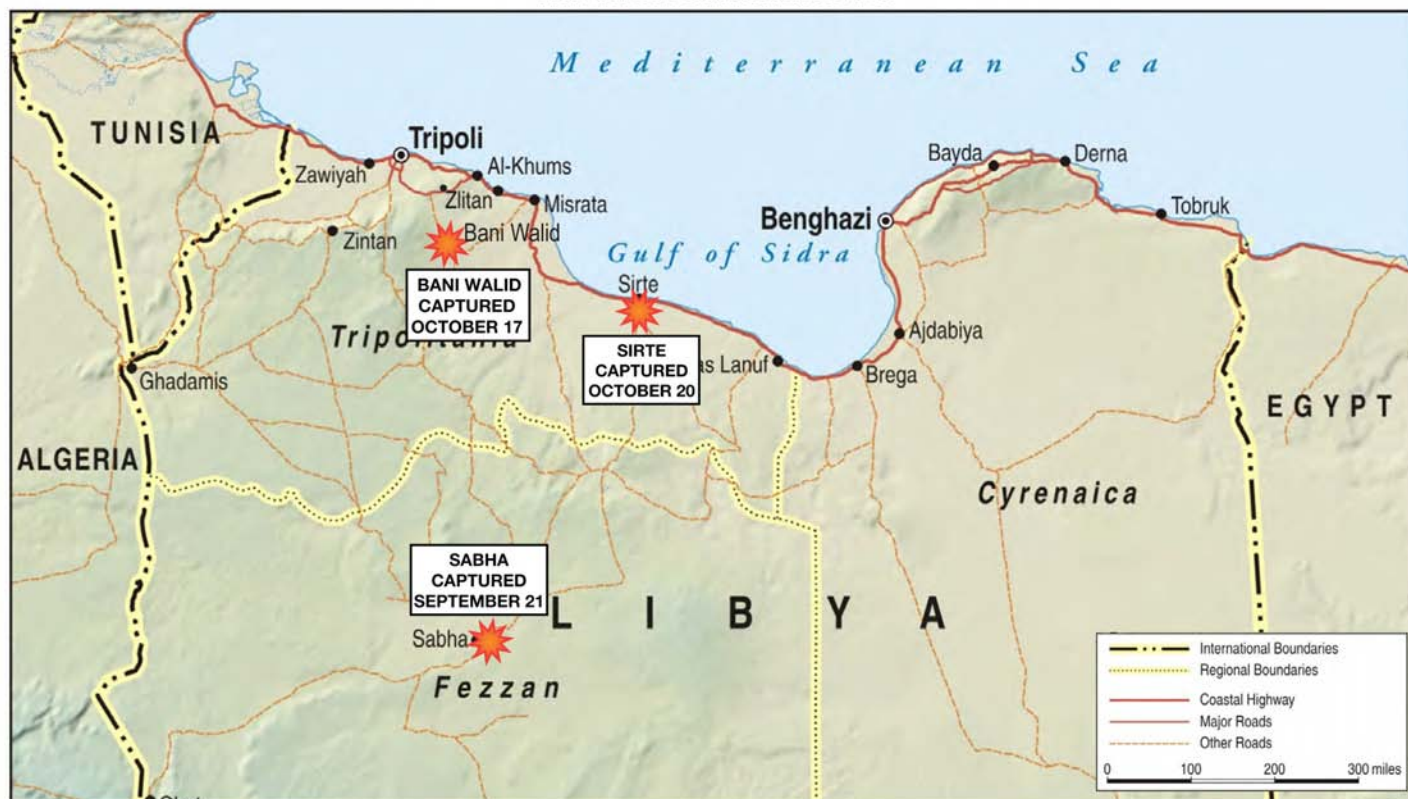
Sirte and Bani Walid posed greater obstacles for the rebels. Qaddafi considerably built up Sirte, his hometown, from 1969 on, using the city as a luxurious destination to host foreign dignitaries and other favored guests.¹⁰³ Having benefited from the dictator's largesse, locals did not rise up against the regime as they did elsewhere. The remaining loyalist security forces set up defensive positions outside the town to fend off rebel attacks.¹⁰⁴ NATO airstrikes increasingly targeted the town after the fall of Tripoli.¹⁰⁵ Rebel forces initially attempted to negotiate with tribal elders to reach a peaceful surrender, but they were unsuccessful. Following a series of truces to permit the civilian population to leave the city, on September 9 rebel forces began advancing from the east, west, and south.¹⁰⁶ The rebel offensive followed the back and forth attack counterattack tactics typical of fighting earlier in the conflict. A massive assault of hundreds of vehicles brought the rebels on the western front to the outskirts of the city on September 15, but they retreated after fierce resistance.¹⁰⁷

The initial assault on Bani Walid also began on September 9 after negotiations with tribal elders broke down.¹⁰⁸ The tenacity of the loyalist defenders and Bani Walid's mountainous geography allowed pro-Qaddafi troops to throw back multiple rebel offensives.¹⁰⁹ Disorganization and a lack of a command structure crippled rebel forces, even though additional militias arrived to lend their support. After a few attempts, the rebels settled in to pummel the city with artillery and the NTC dispatched commander Younis al-Toumi to group the rebels outside of the city into a single operating force.¹¹⁰ The rebel assault suffered a setback on September 28, however, after a rocket attack killed Daw Saleheen, one of the top rebel commanders.¹¹¹

The rebels relied on artillery barrages to weaken loyalist defensive positions at Sirte before continuing their attack. The slow rebel stranglehold cut off Sirte's water, electricity, and access to supplies, which generated a steady stream of civilians leaving the city.¹¹² Despite the slow advance, loyalist counterattacks, and chronic disorganization, the rebels

Once the NTC declared liberation, the transitional timeline was set in motion...The entire process was intended to take approximately a year and a half.

THE FINAL STRONGHOLDS



continued to gain ground and weaken the resistance.¹¹³ By October 10, they surrounded the remaining pro-Qaddafi fighters in the 'Number 2' and 'Dollar' neighborhoods on the western side of the city. Because of the almost constant inaccurate or indiscriminate shelling from rebel artillery, Sirte suffered considerable damage.¹¹⁴

On October 16, rebel forces made unconfirmed claims that they had captured significant portions of Bani Walid. Journalists confirmed the reports on October 17 when they traveled to the city center where rebels were celebrating and raising flags. There were a few pockets of fighting, but the town was ostensibly under rebel control.¹¹⁵ The fall of Bani Walid left the only organized loyalist resistance in Sirte. In Sirte, rebel troops continued to compress the two pockets of resistance, but they had not fallen and the fighting remained fierce.

On October 20, a NATO airstrike outside of Sirte halted a military convoy attempting to flee the city. Rebel forces engaged the vehicles, one of which carried Qaddafi. The rebels successfully took him prisoner, wounded but alive, when they found him hiding in a drainage pipe. Stories of the following events differ, but Qaddafi died before reaching Misrata.¹¹⁶ Officially, interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril stated Qaddafi died after being hit in the

crossfire when rebels engaged with the loyalist convoy and died en route to a hospital in Misrata. However, pictures and video show rebel troops kicking and beating Qaddafi. While bloody, Qaddafi was alive and did not appear to have suffered the close-range gunshot wounds that an autopsy assessed were fatal. Jalil has announced an investigation into Qaddafi's death, but postulated that a loyalist might have intentionally shot Qaddafi to prevent him from revealing incriminating evidence.¹¹⁷

The final pockets of resistance in Sirte soon collapsed, and rebel troops conducted searches for loyalists.¹¹⁸ They found and killed Qaddafi's son Mutassim and army chief Abu Bakr Yunis. There is a video of Mutassim smoking, drinking water, and exchanging comments with his captors. It appeared the camera operator took the video shortly before Mutassim's death, which generated speculation that the rebels executed him.¹¹⁹ The bodies of Qaddafi, his son, and Yunis went to Misrata, where they remained on display in a meat locker for four days.¹²⁰ On October 23, the NTC declared liberation. The declaration marked the beginning of the NTC's transition plans and Jibril announced he would step down from his post as Prime Minister.¹²¹ Two days later, on October 25, the NTC buried Qaddafi, Mutassim, and Yunis at a secret location in the desert after a modest Islamic ceremony.¹²²

Once the NTC declared liberation, the transitional timeline was set in motion. The NTC promised to appoint an Executive Office, to run portfolios and implement NTC policies, and an audit bureau, to ensure proper use of funds, within thirty days of October 23. Ninety days after liberation, the NTC planned to establish a commission and necessary legislation to oversee the election of a Public National Conference (PNC). PNC elections were scheduled to happen within 240 days of liberation. Thirty days after the election, the PNC planned to appoint a prime minister to nominate a government. It would also appoint a Constituent Authority to draft a constitution within 60 days. Once a constitution was written, the PNC would issue general election laws and appoint a Supreme National Elections Commission. Legislative elections would happen within 180 days of the PNC passing of election laws. Once the new legislature met, the PNC would disband. The entire process was intended to take approximately a year and a half.¹²³

On October 21, NATO announced a preliminary decision to end operations on October 31, and planned to confirm the date at an official meeting on October 26.¹²⁴ However, Jalil and Tarhouni both asked NATO to continue its mission in Libya. Jalil stated that the NTC needed its assistance to control weapons, develop defensive systems, and prevent loyalists from fleeing the country.¹²⁵ The NTC may have made this request so that they can maintain international military support, thus keeping them legitimate and giving them the edge of independent militias that are not under their control. Instead of holding the scheduled meeting on October 26, NATO postponed it until October 28 to allow Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen time to consult with the UN and NTC.¹²⁶ Libya's Deputy UN Ambassador Ibrahim Dabbashi requested that the UN hold off on terminating its mandate authorizing NATO action to give the NTC time to assess the country's stability and border security.¹²⁷ However, on October 27, the Security Council unanimously passed a resolution to end the UN mandate permitting intervention on October 31 while leaving the arms embargo and sanctions in place.¹²⁸ NATO's mission in Libya formally ended on October 31, 2011.

V. CONCLUSION

While the revolution successfully removed Qaddafi from power and liberated the country, in November 2011 it was too early for the United States and its allies to declare the intervention in Libya a success. The transition from autocracy to democracy is extraordinarily difficult,

and the NTC would not achieve it overnight or without setbacks. As demonstrated by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, post conflict or phase four operations are the most critical phase of the transition. In the short-term, Libya's future is highly uncertain. The NTC must find a way to exert control over and unify the country in the face of a recovering economy, an unstable security situation, and fragile political alliances. Sobering challenges lay ahead in building a stable, democratic Libya. The NTC needs to surmount challenges to its hold on power, which will be difficult given the state of Libya's economy and the pace at which the international community is unfreezing assets. The Council must also prevent multiple security issues from derailing the transition process, including remaining loyalists, loose weapons, and rogue militias. Politically, the new government must address regional and religious divisions, as well as the reintegration of officials. Finally, the conflict in Libya generated additional diplomatic and security issues for other countries in the region. At this point in time, the United States and its European allies must patiently assist Libya's new government with what will be an inevitably long and challenging process.

The NTC faces challenges to securing its legitimacy. Many independent groups received their funding and supplies not from the NTC but from wealthy individuals, non-government organizations, or foreign countries. The NTC-released budget documents detail how the council spent \$975 million from March to the end of September. Approximately 80 percent paid salaries in rebel-held areas, about 10 percent supported local governing councils, and the rest covered administrative costs. According to the documents, Suraya al-Thuwar, a rebel umbrella group in eastern Libya, was the only militia to receive NTC funding, (approximately \$565,000).¹²⁹ France conducted weapons drops in the mountains, and Sudan shipped arms over the border.¹³⁰ Qatar alone provided money, military training, and over 20,000 tons of weapons. However, only a fraction of Qatar's approximately thirty weapons shipments went through the National Transitional Council. Instead, much of the aid Qatar provided went directly to Islamist-run militias, potentially exacerbating underlying political tensions in the still-forming transitional government.¹³¹ Qatar also revealed that it had ground troops deployed in Libya fighting alongside rebel forces "in every region" to topple Qaddafi.¹³² The amount of uncontrolled support from outside sources is a potentially delegitimizing factor to the NTC. The NTC can better secure its hold on power if it replaces foreign or individual funding with government support.

Allied countries must assist the NTC's drive to gain control first by ceasing deliveries to rogue units. Interim Oil and Finance Minister Ali Tarhouni started requesting countries and organizations stop unauthorized shipments on October 11. He stated, "To any country ... please do not give any funds or weapons to any Libyan faction without the approval of the NTC."¹³³ However, Qatar seemed intent on staying involved and, on October 26, proposed a Qatar-led coalition of countries to take NATO's place once the alliance's operations end.¹³⁴

Preliminary reconstruction efforts in rebel-held areas and recently liberated territory are important to the Council's legitimacy and ability to project power. The conflict caused extensive damage to many cities' basic services. Delivering these services quickly is critical to gaining and maintaining support, but the NTC must work with the remains of a corrupt, disorganized, and inefficient government.¹³⁵ The NTC has previously tried to use cash to shore up operations in recently captured areas. For example, soon after the rebels liberated Sabha, Tarhouni flew \$16 million to the city's bank, hoping to convince stalwart loyalists to disarm.¹³⁶ However, the transitional government must also appear even-handed with the reconstruction, as tensions have already flared over the relief process. Misratans complained that the rebuilding was happening too slowly and accused the NTC of favoring other cities for political reasons. In mid-September, the chief of the local governing council's relief committee stated, "Officials say Misrata is a priority, ... but the operational reality is that Misrata has not received anything that shows they really see it as a priority."¹³⁷

The international community has provided a great deal of immediate humanitarian assistance. Qatar, Malta, Germany, Ireland, Ukraine, the United States, and the United Kingdom have all pledged to help with treating Libyan wounded and training medical personnel.¹³⁸ China's Red Cross Society provided approximately \$7.8 million of total aid to Libya, while the Chinese government sent \$3.2 million worth of aid materials to Tripoli by mid-October.¹³⁹ Russia's Foreign Ministry pledged to render Libya \$7 million in humanitarian aid through international organizations.¹⁴⁰ Libya's medical system, particularly damaged by the chronic shortages of supplies, water, and electricity, has received some direct assistance. Actavis, a pharmaceutical company based in Iceland, shipped €2 million worth of medicine to Libyan hospitals.¹⁴¹ This, at least, is an area where there is considerable international support and engagement. Still, some countries are calling on the international community to commit additional

humanitarian assistance.¹⁴²

In the long term, the NTC must gain the capability to meet Libya's needs consistently. Interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril appealed to the UN for assistance on September 26, stating, "The Libyan people are counting on the capacity of the NTC to be able to provide the basic needs of the citizens. The inability of the NTC or provisional government to provide these kinds of services because of a lack of funding, could affect the very foundations of this council."¹⁴³ According to the World Bank, NTC leaders requested support in the areas of financial management, job creation, infrastructure repair, and service delivery, including the water, energy, and transportation sectors. The International Monetary Fund will cooperate to prepare Libya's budget and restart the country's banking, and promised to send a team once the situation is stable.¹⁴⁴ The NTC has also accrued debts over the course of the conflict that it will need to settle. The rebels have yet to repay \$890 million for the nearly \$1.6 billion worth of fuel they imported over seven months.¹⁴⁵ Jalil promised the NTC would deduct the expenses for Libyans receiving medical treatment abroad from Libya's still-frozen assets.¹⁴⁶ However, the NTC will need to find a secure source of income, to both fund long-term projects and settle its debts.

Libya's natural resource-driven economy seemed like it would be able to fund NTC initiatives quickly. However, the complete reliance of the state and the economy on oil revenues will create immediate and long-term challenges and could be a point of vulnerability for the new government. Before the rebellion, Libya had one of the least diversified economies in the world. Under Qaddafi, the state directed most economic activity by virtue of collecting and dispersing oil revenues. Libya suffered from a persistently high unemployment rate around 25 percent, while two-thirds of the workforce found employment in a bloated and inefficient public sector. Libya has a dearth of natural resources besides oil, and its other industries were chronically underdeveloped. The agricultural sector is small, and the country imported two-thirds of its food, along with most other basic commodities. Even Libya's small industrial base relied on state subsidies and protectionist policies. Some economists postulated that Libya might be able to follow Qaddafi's "Great Man-Made River Project" and harness the potential of the Nubian Aquifer the country sits on. However, oil proceeds drove the project, which suffered damage during the conflict.¹⁴⁷

Before the revolution, Libya exported between 1.6 and

1.8 million barrels per day. The conflict's negative impact on the oil industry caused the International Monetary Fund to predict that Libya's economy will shrink by 50 percent in 2011.¹⁴⁸ Early estimates of the damage to the oil infrastructure indicated that it could take up to three years before production reaches prewar levels but output expectations have risen steadily.¹⁴⁹ The chief executive officer of Austrian-based oil company OMV indicated that it could be as long as eighteen months before Libya reached pre-revolution production levels.¹⁵⁰ As more companies inspected oil fields and restarted production, rebel officials began insisting the industry would recover faster than expected. Mahmoud Jibril and Italian oil company Eni SpA estimated that Libya could reach pre-conflict levels in as little as a year, while National Oil Company's chairman asserted levels could reach 1.5 million barrels a day in less than twelve months.¹⁵¹ By late October, Tarhouni announced output had reached 500,000 barrels per day.¹⁵² Despite increasingly rosy output predictions, oil recovery still has several hurdles left to clear.

Security conditions and financial factors pose problems to both inactive and active oil fields. Waha Oil, a company that produced nearly a fifth of Libya's daily output, has been unable to inspect some of its facilities because of unstable security conditions.¹⁵³ Facilities that have reopened are still in danger from scattered loyalists, even though the final strongholds have fallen. Pro-Qaddafi forces attacked oil facilities at Ras Lanuf on September 12, successfully killing fifteen guards. National Oil Corporation (NOC) chairman Nouri Berouin insisted, "It's an isolated incident. I don't think it will be repeated." However, the mere threat of violence is enough to disrupt production resumption.¹⁵⁴ Other fields suffered extensive damage and looting from the conflict, which could cause production to plateau until companies make repairs.¹⁵⁵ Libya's former oil head, Shokri Ghanem, said the early rise in production was "easy oil" and that "after 1 million barrels [a day] it will be a tougher job to do." Ghanem estimated that the transitional government will need to invest at least \$3 billion for repairs to increase output to pre-conflict production.¹⁵⁶ In addition to cash, the NTC also requires international expertise.¹⁵⁷ The new government must attract foreign workers back to the country, especially to service the oil industry. Before the conflict, approximately 25 percent of the workforce, including many technical and expert positions, was foreign personnel. Now, however, the NTC is inadvertently dissuading their return by preventing oil companies from sending in their own security teams. Many companies, already leery of footing an additional bill for added protection, are unwilling to

restart operations until the country has stabilized and can provide an adequate security guarantee.¹⁵⁸ An oil service manager stated, "At the moment we are planning with a Libyan workforce, with the exception of a few expats who have opted to come back." This manager did not anticipate a significant number of foreigners would return before March 2012.¹⁵⁹

The oil industry is also facing a setback because of the attempted reintegration of loyalist managers.¹⁶⁰ At least 100 oil workers began a strike on September 27 outside of the NOC headquarters to remove several managers, who they saw as being complicit with the Qaddafi regime.¹⁶¹ NOC head Nouri Berouin eventually removed the chairman of the Sirte Oil company. Striking Waha Oil Company workers also led Berouin to promise to dismiss Waha's chairman, Bashir Alashhab, and deputy on October 14.¹⁶² The NTC overturned the deal, however, sending the workers back to strike.¹⁶³ Removing higher-ups in the oil companies is a double-edged sword, because they often remain the most capable ones for the job. Shokri Ghanem, Libya's former oil head, asserted that purges of the working force could threaten the industry's recovery.¹⁶⁴ One NOC official remarked, "It's a shame because it wasn't their fault. At that time, you couldn't say no to Qaddafi."¹⁶⁵

Even if the transitional government brings oil output back to pre-conflict levels in a timely fashion, the money it generates could bring problems of its own. Regionalism and tribalism could complicate the distribution of oil income. Much of Libya's oil and energy infrastructure is located in Cyrenaica, near the central coastline along the region's historical border with Tripolitania. The rebellion shifted the balance of power in Libya towards the east, and rebel leaders may seek to preserve this position going forward. Cyrenaica and Fezzan contain most of Libya's oil fields, and Cyrenaicans held grievances against Qaddafi because he privileged the economy of the west at the expense of the east. This sense of injustice, however, could substantially pressure the next government to devolve the distribution of oil revenues to the regions in some other way. A new system could impoverish Tripolitania, the area with 60 percent of Libya's population. Even though the NTC pledged to honor contracts from the Qaddafi era, it also intends to conduct investigations and cancel all those that they deem corrupt. U.S. Ambassador to Libya Gene Cretz stated the NTC "will have to go back, review them, see which ones are operative, see which ones have to be redone, see which ones have to be discarded completely."¹⁶⁶ This process could displease or alienate international oil companies.¹⁶⁷ Given all of the complications to successfully

restarting the oil industry and all of the issues that come after, Libya's natural resources are hardly guaranteed, problem-free sources of reconstruction funding.

Since the NTC cannot count on the revenue from its natural resources and emerging markets will be too fragile to provide a financial crutch, Libya's frozen assets could emerge as a critical source of money. Despite rebel pleas, countries had only thawed a small portion of the assets by early November. Some funds remain frozen, while sanctions delay the delivery of unfrozen batches. While the UN lifted and modified some of the sanctions when it granted Libya's seat to the NTC, some controls remain in place.¹⁶⁸ The European Union and other countries have their own sanctions they must address to release funds.¹⁶⁹ In September, Japan refused to begin unfreezing its \$4.4 billion of frozen Libyan assets. Instead, it decided to offer \$2 million in emergency aid to help treat those injured in the fighting.¹⁷⁰ After Qaddafi's death, however, the Japanese government promised to thaw \$1.5 billion.¹⁷¹ Britain still has approximately \$15.7 billion in frozen Libyan assets. British Foreign Secretary William Hague remarked on October 17, "We will discuss with them the unfreezing of further assets as they need them and as they are ready to use them. They are actually not ready to make use of them yet."¹⁷² Even if the rebels asked for the funds immediately, Switzerland and Canada both expressed difficulties in unfreezing assets. Switzerland unfroze 385 million francs. It still holds 300 million more and warns that, while they are willing to unblock more, the process could take years.¹⁷³ A senior Canadian Foreign Affairs official commented on the difficulties associated with unfreezing assets because the funds are in U.S. dollars in Canadian branches of British banks.¹⁷⁴ Since it is growing less likely that former regime officials would be able to draw from unfrozen assets, countries may be willing to release more. However, the process of transferring funds to the NTC is not a simple one, and the rebels already face accusations that they have mishandled funds.¹⁷⁵ Granted, even if the transfer and implementation of funds is transparent, some groups will doubtlessly feel like they did not get their fair share.

The transitional government faces considerable internal security challenges. Several isolated incidents have raised the specter of a possible insurgency. There was a successful loyalist assault on the Ras Lanuf refinery on September 12.¹⁷⁶ Historically pro-Qaddafi Tuareg tribes skirmished with opposition fighters at the southern town of Ghadamis on September 24, which also raised concerns about tribal animosities.¹⁷⁷ In Tripoli's Abu

Salim neighborhood, there were clashes between rebel fighters and pro-Qaddafi demonstrators on October 13. It remains unclear whether the rebels or the demonstrators initiated the violence and what may have triggered it. Regardless, the incident prompted opposition forces in Tripoli to man additional checkpoints and conduct intrusive searches of city sections.¹⁷⁸ After reports of revenge violence and widespread looting, some loyalists in Bani Walid vowed to continue to oppose the NTC.¹⁷⁹ While Qaddafi's death reduces the likelihood of an insurgency, other regime officials and Qaddafi family members remain at large.¹⁸⁰

Weapons either distributed by the regime or looted from its stockpiles saturate the country and pose a problem to the new government whether or not lingering loyalists wage an insurgency. The NTC has promised to secure the arms depots and pursue disarmament, but so far has not been successful. Rebel groups pillaged regime's stockpiles and brought the weapons back to their hometowns, including Misrata, Zintan, and Yafran. Even after the rebels declared liberation, weapons stockpiles were unsecured and stealing from them remained commonplace.¹⁸¹ The regional hoarding of arms and ammunition heightens unease and raises the stakes of looming power struggles and area disputes. The unchecked spread of weapons also complicates NTC attempts to disarm independent militias.¹⁸² The NTC must also clear Libya of remaining ordnance, including multiple minefields loyalist troops laid in different regions of the country during the months of fighting.¹⁸³

Countries have recognized some of the major security problems the interim government must confront and have offered to help. The Swiss Foreign Minister proposed that Switzerland help the new Libyan government in three areas: disarmament, demining, and security force reform.¹⁸⁴ The UK offered £600,000 and further support for the UN Mine Actions Service's de-mining work in Libya.¹⁸⁵ The British Ministry of Defense also contributed £1.5 million and a team of experts to cooperate on destroying mobile anti-aircraft rockets with the United States, which expanded its program to secure the weapons to \$40 million and fourteen civilian contractors.¹⁸⁶ Canada allocated \$10 million to help the NTC recover and secure the weapons from stockpiles, while Germany provided €750,000.¹⁸⁷ The international community acknowledges the spread of weapons as a universal problem.

As the NTC begins to form a new interim government, one of its tasks is to bring the independent militias under a formal military force to fill the security vacuum in the country. The regime's military system is an untenable template for the next government. Both Qaddafi and his predecessor King Idris buttressed their regimes with paramilitary forces ingrained with special loyalties down tribal lines while keeping the regular military fragmented and weak. This long-term abuse, combined with the impact of the rebellion and months of NATO airstrikes, left the Libyan military in a state of collapse. The council has attempted to bring rebel groups under a single, civilian-led umbrella, but their efforts have not been wholly successful.

The NTC's inability to bring the disparate groups that liberated Tripoli under a unified command structure may undermine the council's authority by threatening its monopoly of force. The rebel militias continue to self-identify with their regional roots—especially Misrata and towns within the Nafusa Mountains—and have begun to compete for influence within the capital.¹⁸⁸ The NTC hoped to gain a measure of control by appointing Abdel Hakim Belhaj as head of the Tripoli Military Council (TMC), but not all of the rebel groups follow Belhaj.¹⁸⁹ The Council requested that unaffiliated bands of rebels leave Tripoli because of concerns that the fighters would destabilize the city. Sadiq Zarouq, a representative of a group in Tripoli, stated, “We accept the role they [the militias] played in securing victory in the capital, ... but the protection of Tripoli must be left to the revolutionaries from these districts, after they have been registered and their loyalty to the February 17 revolution verified.”¹⁹⁰ The militias in question, however, asserted they would remain in Tripoli to ensure they had a contribution in creating the new government.¹⁹¹ A few days later on October 2, rebels in Tripoli announced the formation of a new military group to provide security, the Tripoli Revolutionists' Council (TRC), whose authority overlapped with the TMC. Its commander, Abdullah Ahmed Naker, asserted that the Revolutionists' Council had 22,000 armed fighters from seventy-three different factions. Naker questioned Belhaj's authority and ability to provide security but insisted he would cooperate with the TMC and the NTC.¹⁹² A day after Naker announced the formation of the new security group, Belhaj called for militias to pull their men and weapons out of Tripoli. Belhaj's assistant leveled the accusation that “whoever doesn't recognize the legitimacy of the (military) council doesn't recognize the legitimacy of the national council.”¹⁹³ After Belhaj's order, however, militias stayed

in the city. Even if they maintain peaceful relations with the TMC, the formation of the TRC demonstrates the willingness of rebel groups to ignore NTC directives and leverage their power for political gain.¹⁹⁴

The lack of control over rebel militias also stands to challenge NTC authority by derailing reconciliation efforts. While the NTC had some success when Jalil called on Libyans to avoid looting and excessive violence during the taking of Tripoli, there are several pockets of the country where fighters have shown significantly less restraint and tarnished the reputation of the rebels.¹⁹⁵ In July, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported fighters out of the Nafusa Mountains pillaged and destroyed property in Qawalish, Awnaiya, Rayaniyah, and Zawiyat Bagul. The rebel troops acknowledged that they were ignoring orders not to loot.¹⁹⁶ Later in the conflict, rebels from Misrata turned their wrath against the nearby town of Twaragha. Opposition fighters looted and torched buildings in the largely deserted town. Even the NTC seemed unwilling to intervene in this matter, as Jibril stated, “nobody has the right to interfere in the matter except the people of Misrata.”¹⁹⁷ The recently taken loyalist holdouts are tribal areas that were the strongest supporters of Qaddafi: the Qadadfa in Sirte, the Warfalla in Bani Walid, and the Maqarha in Sabha. There are bitter feelings among opposition fighters because Qaddafi privileged these tribes with status and wealth. He incorporated large numbers of tribesmen into his paramilitary forces, which played large roles in the more devastating battles. After seizing Qasr Abu Hadi on the way to Sirte, rebel troops ransacked the town, looting and burning homes.¹⁹⁸ The same fate awaited many of the districts of Sirte after opposition fighters drove out loyalist combatants.¹⁹⁹ As of November, entire neighborhoods were destroyed, basic services remained cut off, debris clogged the city, and broken pipes flooded the streets.²⁰⁰

There are documented cases of opposition forces abusing human rights. HRW accused opposition fighters of mistreating civilians in cities outside of the Nafusa Mountains. They reportedly targeted members of the Mashashiya tribe, longtime supporters of the Qaddafi regime. Instead of addressing the issue, rebels in the area attempted to play down the incidents.²⁰¹ Amnesty International also documented human rights abuses that anti-Qaddafi forces committed.²⁰² Independent militias are conducting arrests without any oversight. Coupled with the lack of a working judicial system, the influx of new prisoners has forced the rebels to hold more than

7,000 detainees in makeshift prisons where Amnesty International found widespread abuse and occasional torture.²⁰³ Often, rebel groups target black Africans, extremely common among Libya's migrant worker population, and accuse them of serving as mercenaries for the Qaddafi regime.²⁰⁴ Misratan rebels are directing their wrath against Twaraghan residents by not allowing them to return to the town. When fighters encounter Twaraghans in other areas of Libya, they segregate them or bring them back to Misrata for questioning.²⁰⁵ Most recently, HRW uncovered the remains of fifty-three bodies, believed to be loyalists, in a rebel-held hotel in Sirte. The report declared that some of the bodies bore the marks of execution. HRW has called for an investigation into the suspected massacre.²⁰⁶ The mistreatment could provoke resistance to the new government by those who feel wronged. This revives the concerns of an insurgency or something more sinister. Reports of revenge violence and widespread destruction have prompted some loyalists in Bani Walid to pledge to continue to resist the NTC.²⁰⁷ According to a rebel negotiator, some Tuareg leaders have threatened to seek out an alliance with Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb if they believe the new government is not treating them fairly.²⁰⁸

While the NTC promised investigations into the claims of abuse, rebel leaders have not detailed their progress or any results from inquiries. The council is making efforts to ease the burden on the justice system while working to reform it. An anonymous official revealed plans for an amnesty program for pro-Qaddafi fighters who did not commit war crimes and who agree to cooperate with the new government in late October.²⁰⁹ The NTC also signed a memorandum of understanding with Qatar to facilitate cooperation between the two country's public prosecution offices.²¹⁰ The NTC, however, must still find a successful way to disarm the militias, keep them from alienating the defeated population, and bring them under civilian control.

Assuming the new government is able to address the economic and security challenges, it will still have to grapple with political issues to be successful. Religious and regional groups must overcome Qaddafi's legacy of authoritarian rule to contribute in a democracy. Because of the long dictatorship, there are few political parties to facilitate the country's transition to a democratic government. Several long-established exiled nationalist parties, such as the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, and underground Islamist parties, such as the

Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, could play significant roles. For the most part, Libyans have barely started to form any political organizations outside of city and local councils that can channel their interests.

Libya has deep political cleavages down regional and tribal lines. Officials from eastern Libya dominate the NTC, undermining its legitimacy in the western regions of the country. Even though the council claimed it had representatives from loyalist areas, their names remained unreleased. There are already divisions within the rebel ranks developing along east-west lines.²¹¹ Libyan rulers and political elites have always had a difficult time appealing across these cleavages. Different areas, Misrata and the Nafusa Mountains especially, are seeking more political influence because of their roles in the revolution. Zintan settled for two ministerial appointments in Libya's interim cabinet after initially demanding three positions.²¹² Regional disputes such as these were the primary reason the NTC had to delay the formation of a new executive board on multiple occasions.²¹³ Tribal tensions already boiled over after property disputes in western Libya. In Zuwarah, arguments over land and camel ownership led to tit-for-tat kidnappings between Arab and Berber tribes before escalating to violent clashes that left ten people dead. Instead of addressing the issue, the NTC claimed the skirmishes targeted loyalists.²¹⁴

Rumors abound about a possible Islamic-secular divide. After the fall of Tripoli, the NTC attempted to assuage Islamist concerns by appointing Abdel Hakim Belhaj as head of the TMC. The appointment unsettled some western countries, as Belhaj was the former chief of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a terrorist group that trained at al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s. The CIA detained Belhaj in Bangkok in 2004 and sent him back to Libya, where the regime imprisoned him. After his appointment, Belhaj claimed that the LIFG was never associated with al-Qaeda and that he bore no grudge against the West for his arrest and extradition. Belhaj reportedly led a rebel militia in the attack on Tripoli, but his role during the rest of the conflict is unknown. Rumors of a religious split between secularists and Islamists surfaced after the plan to consolidate the militias under civilian control reportedly caused arguments between him and Jibril. Even though Belhaj did not appear at the new conference announcing the plan to fold the TMC under civilian control, Jibril asserted the rumors were untrue.²¹⁵ Ali Salabi, a prominent Islamic scholar who has close ties

with Belhaj, denounced Jibril and the NTC as “extreme secularists” who would bring Libya into “a new era of tyranny and dictatorship.”²¹⁶ Later, Salabi clarified his statements, saying he called for “moderate” Islam and criticized Jibril because of his “professional capabilities and performance,” not his religious views.²¹⁷ Still, Islamists are determined to be involved in the formation of the new government and have offered veiled threats if they do not have a say. Belhaj stated the intent of Islamists to “resist attempts by some Libyan politicians to exclude some of the participants of the revolution ... Their political myopia renders them unable to see the huge risks of such exclusion.”²¹⁸ So far, the NTC seems to have met expectations. During his speech declaring the liberation of Libya, Jalil declared that Islam would form the core of the new government and be the foundation for the new constitution.²¹⁹ However, this does not change the difficult balancing act the new government must perform to please all of the involved parties.

Because the NTC has promised to include Islamists in the new government, the new leaders have taken care to assuage the fears of Western backers. The United States and European governments have made statements concerning the importance of human rights, women’s rights, minority rights, due process, and transparency. Belhaj publicly stated that, while he holds the United States and United Kingdom responsible for his torture and detention, he would use the legal system to get compensation. After Jalil made his statement using Islam as the basis for a new government, Libya’s ambassador to the United States, Ali Suleiman Aujali, contended that “sharia law, Islamic law, it is not against democracy, it is not against equality, is not against the relations with the other countries based on interests and respect and cooperation.”²²⁰

The new government will also have to balance reappointing those who served under the regime with gaining public support for the new positions. Suspicions of former regime officials within the rebel ranks are high and could spiral into revolutionary excesses and radicalism. The assassination of the top rebel military commander General Abdul Fattah Younis in July by a rebel militia suspected of acting on behalf of several NTC officials has already demonstrated these concerns.²²¹ These tensions could not only exacerbate divisions among the rebels but also inhibit any chance of reconciliation with former regime supporters. There have been demonstrations to protest the reappointment of regime officials, but those who held positions for Qaddafi’s government often remain the most capable choices. Some NTC officials have tried to assuage

public concern by saying they are only retaining officials to keep essential services functioning until a new government is formed.²²² This only delays the problem of forming a capable, yet publicly accepted, government.

Finally, the ripple effects of Libya’s revolution pose security risks and threaten the stability of surrounding countries. Escaping regime members or loyalist fighters create diplomatic and security problems for other countries. Niger and Algeria both hold members of Qaddafi’s family who fled the country earlier in the conflict. Niger has Qaddafi’s son Saadi under house arrest, while Algeria has Qaddafi’s wife, daughter Aisha, and sons Hannibal and Mohammed. The NTC requested the extradition of the family members, but neither of the countries has capitulated. Their presence risks upsetting Niger and Algeria’s diplomatic relations with the new government. The return of Tuaregs, who served as pro-Qaddafi fighters in Libya, to their home countries is another risk. Government officials in Mali stated that approximately 400 Tuareg fighters crossed the border from Libya on October 20.²²³ The returning fighters have reportedly supported the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad (NMLA), a merger of two Malian rebel groups. The ex-Libyan fighters gave support to the NMLA, which stood at odds with the government of Mali because it sought independence for northern Mali.²²⁴

The regime’s vast weapons stockpiles are especially capable of disrupting security. The large quantities of plastic explosives and anti-aircraft missiles that Qaddafi amassed are high-value targets for terrorist groups to steal. Plastic explosives offer a higher degree of lethality, reliability, and durability than homemade bombs typically used by al-Qaeda affiliates. Qaddafi provided three tons of Semtex to the Irish Republican Army in the 1980s that the group used in its bombing campaign in Northern Ireland and England.²²⁵ In June, security forces in Niger intercepted a heavily armed convoy coming from Libya carrying a ton of plastic explosives and hundreds of detonators.²²⁶ Qaddafi also amassed nearly 20,000 shoulder-fired anti-air missiles over his decades as dictator, many of which have gone missing. While rebel efforts recovered some, an unknown number have left stockpiles in the hands of rebel groups or arms smugglers.²²⁷ Multiple countries have detected the weapons outside Libya. In September, Egyptian security forces seized eight anti-aircraft missiles and four shoulder launchers in the Sinai Peninsula.²²⁸ Two anonymous U.S. officials asserted there was evidence that Soviet anti-aircraft missiles had reached the black market in Mali.²²⁹ Later in October, Egyptian

officials asserted that Libyan rockets and anti-aircraft guns were available on Sinai's black market. In the hands of Palestinians, the weapons could threaten Israel and in the hands of Bedouins, they could complicate Egypt's move to democracy.²³⁰ The European Union's counter-terrorism coordinator, Gilles de Kerchove, asserted that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has "gained access to weapons, either small arms or machine-guns, or certain surface-to-air missiles which are extremely dangerous because they pose a risk to flights over the territory."²³¹ Weapons may have also reached the hands of the Justice and Equality Movement in Sudan. Sudan's ambassador to the UN, Daffa-Alla Elhaq Ali Osman, stated that the rebel group acquired over 100 truckloads of weapons.²³² However, the Sudanese army said the rumors "are unfounded and lack substance."²³³ Regardless, an influx of small arms and other weapons to rebel groups in Niger, Chad, Sudan, and elsewhere through Libya's porous borders could adversely affect regional stability.

The international community recognizes this as a grave threat. As detailed earlier, many countries have been contributing to combating the spread of weapons within Libya. The U.S., in addition to its aid package and civilian contractors, retasked African Command's air assets to patrol Libya's borders.²³⁴ Yet, while multiple countries have funded efforts to locate and secure the weapons in Libya, little has gone to the countries that may be affected by the proliferation. Neighboring countries have had to increase the protection of their own borders, something not all of them are capable of doing. Niger requested international assistance to secure its border with Libya.²³⁵

The former rebels are finally moving towards establishing a democratic state after a nine-month conflict that devastated sections of the country and scarred the population. Opposition forces, with the help of NATO and Arab forces, weathered loyalist offensives to remove Qaddafi from power and wrest the country from the regime's control. The new leaders have an unmistakable air of optimism moving forward despite the multitude of challenges complicating the process. It will be a long process, even if the transition is successful. Libya remains in a delicate situation that will require continued international engagement to resolve its regional disputes, secure the country, form a functioning government, establish a security apparatus, and stem the spread of weaponry.

NOTES

¹ It should be noted there has been a mixture of Arab-Berber decent, but the population still is identified as a separate group. Smaller Berber communities exist in Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

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