

## **Statement by**

A Omar Turbi  
Expert, U.S Libya Relations  
Before the Committee on International Relations  
Subcommittee: Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

### **The Conflict in Libya** Wednesday, May 15th, 2019

I am truly honored to have the opportunity to provide testimony to your distinguished committee on - **The Conflict in Libya.**

In spite of the current conflict between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and rogue militias allied with the United Nations sponsored Government of National Accord (GNA), I remain optimistic and believe that we can ultimately achieve our goal to establish a democratic government if we support the LNA. I believe that the current conflict represents a continuing evolution toward the ultimate emergence of a democratic process in Libya. Dislodging the Qaddafi dictatorial regime with help from the United States and our European allies in 2011 was rightfully applauded and celebrated around the world as a step in the right direction. Now we must take the next very important step and support the legitimate Libyan National Army in its efforts to restore security, law and order and establish democracy in Libya.

Libya is in a region that has been governed for decades primarily by two non democratic institutions; military dictatorships, or political islam, neither of which have shown progress towards building civil society with economic development. Neither of these forms of leadership will help Libya become stable or emerge and gain acceptance in the world community.

Eight years after the fall of the Qaddafi regime it has become vividly clear; the Libyan people in the current atmosphere of instability are unable to establish a functioning state. The United Nations sponsored Government of National Accord established in December 17th, 2015 never met any of its minimum mandated objectives of disarming militias, integrating members of militia groups into society, creating a democratic process for the eventual ratification of a viable constitution, and establishing police and security forces.

The unfortunate irony is that the UN sponsored Government of National Accord continued to pour substantial amounts of money in maintaining and increasing the number of militias in Tripoli and Misrata to a staggering number of 250,000. It must be noted the total population of Tripoli and Misrata is less than 1.5m people. Instead of disarming the militias, the Government of National Accord has increased their numbers that carry more than 21 million pieces of arms.

Mismanagement of national resources, cash reserves and corruption has worsened in the past four years to unprecedented levels. Observers on the inside and outside of Libya, international policy makers and the United Nations have not yet been able to properly analyze the root causes of such utter failure. Unfortunately the UN continues sponsorship of the Government of National Accord and has not evaluated the unacceptable results of UN sponsorship of this rogue regime that pretends to be legitimate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many of us had great aspirations that after the disappearance of the Qaddafi regime, a pluralistic system would emerge where every Libyan would have the opportunity to participate in a democratic process of proper and qualified representation, a system of accountability, and transparency, with co-equal branches of governance, and a judicial branch all under a ratified Constitution. We had hoped the result would be a democracy modeled after the Constitutional government of the United States.

However, in an unstable atmosphere, after decades of absence of viable institutions, deliberate obstruction and prevention of western Non Government Organizations (NGOs) from providing democratic processes assistance to the Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC), and the GNC by their respective members since 2011, gave rise to the only alternative institution - Political Islam and radical political islamists. These radical Islamists in Libya were emboldened by their counterparts in Egypt, where many NGO workers, accused of being spies were expelled by the Muslim Brotherhood led government in Egypt in 2013.

Radical Islamists have willfully and systematically prevented western Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) from assisting in the construction of democratic processes.

On June 25th, 2014, the Libyan people elected a new 200 member legislative body to replace the outgoing General National Congress (GNC) of which term had expired in February, 2014. Many members of the former GNC who represented political islam refused to relinquish their seats.

Although Libyans were optimistic at the prospects of a new beginning, low voter turn out due to lack of public security, poor planning and many of the same of less qualified former members of GNC ended up in the new legislative body known as the House of Representatives ( HoR)

Political islamists who refused to give up their seats on the GNC and continued alliance with militias from the fortified city of Misrata forced well over 140 members of the HoR to seek refuge in eastern Libya.

At the inception of the HoR in June 2014, due to fear for their lives, its members voted to relocate its headquarters to Benghazi away from the militias. The HoR's transition to Benghazi was unfortunately short lived and moved to the city of Tobruk further east nearly 1000 miles east of Tripoli due to lack of security, and the existence of Ansar Al-Sharia, and other Al-Qaeda terrorist elements in Benghazi.

The fracture of the fragile democratic institution (GNC) by the islamic radicals and the ineffectual HoR in the east contributed to the current chaotic state of affairs in Libya. The islamist-led Government of National Accord in Tripoli relied heavily on rogue militias, and prevented the establishment of a national army police and security forces, with no viable alternative system of governance,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Currently, and comes as no surprise, the advancing troops of the Libyan National Army (LNA) that began early April this year under the command of General Khalifa Hafter is attempting to overcome the militias and the rulership of radical Islamist and restore law and order in western Libya.

General Hafter arrived at the scene in Libya very early on at the inception of the 2011 revolution. He held a senior militant position and provided brilliant and successful tactical strategies which worked effectively to protect the city of Benghazi from the advancing Qaddafi troops. After the success of the revolution, Hafter took it upon himself to continue to form an army.

General Hafter's successes in flushing out Islamic extremist in Benghazi in 2014, and eliminating ISIS from the city of Derna early 2015 with help from the Egyptian Air Force earned him a formal post with the temporary government in eastern Libya. He was appointed on March 2nd, 2015 as the commander of the Libyan National Army by HoR. The Egyptian Air Force played an important role when it bombed ISIS locations in Derna, and Sirt in part to bolster Hafter's command and retaliate for the massacre and brutal beheading of 21 Coptic Christian Egyptians by ISIS in the Libyan coastal city of Sirt in February, 2015.

Libyan National Army under the command of General Haftar grew at present to well over 28,000 armed soldiers from across Libya and continues to gain prominence, acceptance and credibility with greater number of Libyans. The LNA brought stability to southern Libya and protected the borders giving LNA control over more than 80% of the country of Libya. Fortunately now, it is believed that more than 75% of Libya supports the LNA in its mission in restoring law and order in the country.

Although oil revenues continue to flow through the Government of National Accord which controls the National Oil Company (NOC), and the Libyan Central Bank, LNA and the temporary Libyan government in eastern Libya managed to provide respectable public services to many parts of Libya.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United States and our allies in Europe authorized NATO to take measured steps to rid the Libyan people and the world from the menace of Qaddafi in 2011. Our job is not finished.

At present a confirmed growing number of notorious groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda fighters are joining the rogue and criminal militias from Misrata, and from Tripoli to derail the Libyan National Army from restoring law and order in Tripoli. A 29 years old paid mercenary named Jimmy Rees, a Portuguese national was captured on May 7th when his Mirage F1 that took off from Misrata was shot down by LNA. He confessed that he was hired and instructed to destroy roads and bridges in Tripoli. He is believed to have been hired by the GNA and its allied militias in Misrata.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the current conflict in and around Tripoli is between good and evil. Do we want to support the tactical and strategic timely move by the Libyan National Army to restore law and order in the whole of country of Libya, and eliminate radical terrorists or **do we want to support those who were responsible for the brutal killing of our Ambassador Chris Stevens in Benghazi September 12th, 2012?**

Which side do we want to be on?

We must demand and be firm that Turkey and Qatar cease their material and blatant support of the radical islamists in Libya.

As the superpower history will unfortunately judge us harshly. The prospects of an intractable crisis are looming, and Libya is a declared failed state at the center of a critical region of the World.

Honorable Congressmen, and honorable Congresswomen I believe in order for our foreign policy to succeed with Libya and the region, we must pursue one that is truly based on enlightened self-interest. We must take the lead and work with the United Nations Security Council. I would like to make the following recommendations:

(1). United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), under the existing UN resolutions adopted in 2011 must be immediately revised to declare that the Government of National Accord is no longer recognized by the UN. The revised UN decision is predicated on the failure of the GNA to meet the timelines and objectives required under the original UN sponsored Government of National Accord in December 2015.

(2). The UN shall work hand-in-hand with the temporary government in eastern Libya, the Libyan National Army commanded by General Haftar and help to restore the House of Representatives (HoR) as an interim legislative body. The UN and the temporary government in the east will promote the safe transition of the HoR from Benghazi to Tripoli, the unified capital of Libya.

(3). The UN should act, as a proactive party Libya needs now the most and take the lead in managing and guaranteeing the enforcement of the forging revised UN resolutions with the support of the International Community.

(4). The UN should guide a democratic mechanism for the establishment of a legislative body as soon as possible that can replace the temporary House of Representatives (HoR) and provide direct support and effective guidelines for the nominations, elections and parliamentary conduct for the new House of Representatives (HoR).

(5). The UN should provide more direct and active support for the new constitution's drafting and ratification process, already in place by a new committee in charge of drafting the constitution, as well as greater support for the adoption of the new constitution in a national referendum to be managed by the UN.

(6). Work closely with the Libyan National Army (LNA), under the authority of the interim and newly elected legislative body and its nominated government to stabilize the country and create viable and secure Libyan territories for all of its civilian population.

(7). Support the inclusion of all Libyans regardless of beliefs or political opinion in the process of a peaceful political transition including all political exiles and war refugees of Libyans scattered between Egypt and Tunisia.