



A vision for Libya
Speech to members of the British Parliament and diplomatic corp
London - UK September 19th, 2011
A Omar Turbi فتحي عمر التربي

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am honored to appear before your distinguished gathering.

As a Libyan I feel a tremendous sense of pride. We have finally been able to remove a terrible dictator and a menace to the world.

On behalf of myself and the Libyan people I would like to express our gratitude to the British people for their support.

The UK took the lead very early on and rallied the USA, France and the world for intervention to save lives. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the mission has been purely humanitarian.

Had we not acted on Saturday March 19th, I am sure Qaddafi would have leveled the city of Benghazi and massacred hundreds of thousands of helpless Libyan civilians.

This megalomaniac, psychopath, would have used the arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) he had in his possession on the Libyan people if the UK and the USA had not removed them only a few years ago.

This is truly a moment in history where we can say with confidence that Western, Libyan, Arab and Muslim interests have converged in the most profound way.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many people wonder, whether what happened in Tunis and Egypt gave rise to the Libyan revolution. I am happy for the Tunisian and Egyptian people. I am sure no one here has any doubt, the Libyan people have suffered for 42 years and reasons to rise against the Qaddafi dictatorship have been many.

In my talk today I will share with you some facts which have not been publicly and widely known.

The year 1999 marks a very important turning point in Libya's history. Libya, and the Libyan people were in a very bad shape in every imaginative way. Sanctions took their toll at every Level. Quality of life was one of worst in the region. Libya was in a very dismal state. Hope and faith by the Libyan people in the exiled Libyan community to rescue them was marked with hopelessness and helplessness.

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Many Libyans like myself came to the ultimate conclusion that, "regime change can only happen by stepping on the inside, and creating the right set of conditions for the Libyan people to rise"

But how? Was the big question? Qaddafi's grip was tighter than ever..

We knew it would take a long time, patience and hard work.

We had to start somewhere...

I am proud to have committed a great portion of my life to such mission.

Ladies & Gentleman

In 1999 I began to wonder if there is a rare chance that constructive political engagement deployed by the UK with the Libyan regime could provide a way for an opening for Libyans to embark on change.

Can I initiate such approach on my own?

Deep down in my heart and mind, I had a tremendous amount of hesitation. I had fear not only from the brutal Qaddafi regime but the potential loss of a decade of human rights activism through **Libyan Human Rights Commission**. Can I risk relations with the exiled community? Common sense and boldness told me; openness of Libya and the Libyan people to the world will inevitably result in the demise of the Qaddafi regime. This became my motto for the next 10 years.

I have always admired the UK's doctrine of political engagement with it's enemies. It took the lead in 1999 and reopened it's embassy in Tripoli.

After the UK took the initiative in 1999, sooner or later, I figured the USA would follow. In July 1999 I delivered my first promotion of constructive engagement between the U.S.A and Libya in a testimony to the the U.S Congress, House Committee on Foreign Relations. <http://www.omarturbi.org/househearings99.pdf> In the testimony, I made two appeals: (1). The release of all political prisoners in Libya. (2). Resumption of normalization of relations between the USA and Libya. Outlining mutual interests for the USA and the Libyan people.

Taking a bold initiative, and calling on the USA to resume relations with the Libyan regime took many people in Washington and Libyans everywhere by surprise. Frankly, It was a hard road that paid off at the end.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The toughest choice for me then was engaging a dictatorial regime that killed and imprisoned members of my family and friends for many years.

After sixty days of my July 22, 1999 testimony to congress, I received a call from a family member. "The Libyan embassy in London wants to talk to you about your imprisoned brother". I responded through the same messenger "It is simple, release Dr. Omran Turbi and all political prisoners, I will in return keep pushing the USA to normalize relations with the Libyan regime. Further proof - If you do so I will arrange for a U.S envoy to travel to Libya"

At the time of my congressional testimony, Senior Congressman Ed Royce sent a letter to Muamar Qaddafi soliciting his assistance in the release of Dr. Turbi. Royce was prepared to travel to Libya on Dr. Turbi's behalf.

For the next two years, I had indirect dialogue with the Libyan regime through the Libyan embassy in London and later with its UN envoy to the UN with a consistent message "if you release political prisoners, and my brother who had served by then 17 years, I will arrange for an important U.S envoy to travel to Libya"

Sir Eldon Griffiths who is here with us tonight received an invitation to travel to Libya, I arranged for him through Libya's Ambassador to the UN Abuzade Dorda. Dorda was authorized by the Libyan regime to confirm that a U.S envoy would indeed travel to Libya, while doing so he worked on the Libya side to win the release of Dr. Omran Turbi from prison. I told Dorda in May of the year 2000, the arrangement is on only if all political prisoners are released. My contact with Ambassador Dorda was facilitated by Ahmad Al-Mageni a prominent member of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL).

My friendship with Sir Eldon Griffiths started in 1990, when he was commissioned by the **World Affairs Councils of America** (WACA) based in Washington, DC, with 82 branches in the USA, as its Chairman, he sought out Arab nationalist who have interest in the Arab Israel peace process. We became best of friends, we traveled on delegation missions to Lebanon and other Arab countries. It is a sheer coincidence that Griffiths was a member of the British parliament representing a district in the UK where U.S fighter jets flew from to hit the barracks of Bab-Al-Azayzia in April 1986.

Sr. Eldon Griffiths agreed to meet with Dorda in New York, early 2001 and receive a letter on my behalf from my brother Dr. Omran Turbi who was still in AbuSleem prison. The letter was dispatched to me through Dorda. Griffiths had to either reject the invitation to meet Muamar Qaddafi in June 2002 or lose his powerful post as the Chairman of WACA. He elected the latter.

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When Griffiths went to Libya for 8 days, he was received like a head of state. He carried two messages; the 1st was a written letter from me to Qaddafi: a thank you note for releasing Dr. Turbi who was in prison for 17 years, and other political prisoners. I also appealed to him to allow Libyan exiles to have a safe passage and return to Libya. The 2nd one, was a verbal message Sr. Eldon Griffiths apparently carried from the U.S government, which I was not aware of until it was published in the media later which was "if you want a relationship with the USA, you must give up your weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ambitions"

Throughout the next eight years I traveled to Libya as a U.S citizen until 18 months preceding the February 17th revolution. The Libyan regime denied me a visa. I received no cooperation from Tripoli nor its Ambassador in Washington, DC. The tactics of the Libyan regime and its Ambassador was to force me to accept a Libyan passport failed. The regime and its Ambassador in Washington, DC went as far as accusing me of being a CIA agent. Why I wondered? (1). They were puzzled why I was not aggressively chasing business deals in Libya. (2). I encouraged U.S businesses, and educational institutions to bring knowledge and know-how at my own expense without a monetary reward. For example implementing a Libyan national master plan for water and waste water and solid waste management system. I simply could not find a way to do business without engaging in corruption.

During the filming of Running the Sahara, the documentary film I produced with Matt Damon in 2007 there were two attempts on my life by Qaddafi's security forces

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Constructive Engagement continued:

Between 2003 to 2008, we began to realize tangible successes:

- (1). The successful dismantling of the arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), which Qaddafi would have used on Libyans this year.
- (2). I won the release of over 400 political prisoners.

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(3). Through my frequent travels, for the next 8 years, I negotiated concessions by the Libyan regime to allow members of the exiled community to come back, and be allowed a safe passage. The process of normalization between the U.S and Libya stretched from 2003 to August 2008. To the credit of the U.S government there were calls for improving human rights in Libya.

(4). Over time further confidence building measures between the Qaddafi regime and the UK, and the USA took place. The more secure the Qaddafi regime felt over the past 10 years the more open it had become. Allowing some level of descent.

I believe the culmination of the above constructive engagement helped the Libyan people to rise on February 17th, 2011.

A vision for Libya:

Ladies & gentlemen,

Libya has great potential to become a vibrant economy, a positive regional player, and a prosperous nation. It has excellent natural resources, cash reserves, and more than \$700b of foreign investments, and a fantastic geo location

The greatest challenge we face today is creating jobs and empowering a huge and a growing young Libyan population.

80% of Libyans are under the age of 35. 60% of which are under the age of 25. The unemployment rate in Libya is at 25%. It has been at this rate for years.

Libya's GDP per capita is less than \$12000. Do you believe that over 20% of the Libyan population or 1.3m people of 5.5 million people are at the poverty level.

Much of the direct foreign investment (FDI) in the past 8 years from oil to infrastructure companies failed to improve employment. In fact in the past 4 to 5 years alone, many Libyan engineers who worked at NOC fled to the Gulf states for higher wages. You can also find Libyan pilots, medical doctors and professors that work in the Gulf states.

Recent estimates by World Bank put the average annual growth in the productivity of labor in the non-oil sector at minus 2%.

The Libyan business environment requires significant improvement ranked 109th in the world. Only Albania and Paraguay rank lower.

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Perhaps the biggest fear I have post the Qaddafi regime that people's time will be most spent trying to capture a greater share of the windfalls rather than engaging in productive employment or enterprise.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here are some of what needs to be done?:

In the near term we need to address the fundamental aspirations of the Libyan people:

(a). Redefine relations between the state and the people. Adopt a constitution that reflects the aspirations and the sentiments of the Libyan people. This will give birth to a new governance built on a rock solid system of qualified representation, transparency, and accountability. These are the tenants of democracy.

(b). We must make reducing unemployment to less than 7% in 48 months a top priority by embarking on the following:

I had a glimpse of hope when the National Economic Development Board (NEDB) was established in 2006 at the recommendation of the Monitor Group which is affiliated with Harvard University. It was to be an emulation of the Singapore, and Irish EDB's. Instead it was riddled with corruption, inflated salaries and a conduit of millions of dollars for liberation socialist political movements around the world at the direction of Qaddafi and his son Saif. In more than 3 years it did not help reduce unemployment, nor bring any foreign investment.

In order to reach our goals in reducing unemployment:

(1). We have to re-establish the mission and goals of the NEDB. When foreign direct investment (FDI) is sought, it must be based on employing Libyans, and partnering with Libyans. That is common sense. NEDB must provide the proper industrial, and hospitable climate for foreign investors to build and manufacture goods in Libya.

(2). We must start to implement confidence building measures in international contracts:
(i). Carefully evaluate existing contracts and root out those that have bribery built into them. (ii). Affirm the rules of the **International Arbitration Association** with respect to arbitration locations, and prevailing languages. And allow the English language to be interpreted side by side with Arabic.

(3). We will need to establish watch dog organizations to assure transparency, accountability, and a corruption free business environment.

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(4). We must immediately start an application to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and quickly secure a credit rating.

(5). We must employ the best means, legal and otherwise to trace and repatriate Libyan state assets worldwide and those hidden under the Qaddafi family's name.

Libyan foreign assets are estimated at more than \$700B. We should hope to make them more efficient and better income producing assets.

(6). We must build human capacity to create a productive skilled work force.

(7). Libyans are very confident and hospitable people, and can easily absorb and adapt to working with highly skilled immigrants. However, a sound immigration policy must be adopted.

(8). We must create an economy that is fully integrated with global markets.

(9). We must build a world class infrastructure and start with a National Water Waste Water Master plan and a solid waste management master plan.

(10). Improve telephone and internet communications to be state-of-the-art equal or better to those in Europe.

(11). Build a world class airliner flagship, connecting Africa, Europe, the Middle east and beyond.

(12). Ramp up tourism, and allow tourists easy or no visa process from around the world.

(13). Strengthen cooperation between Libyan educational institutions and industry and encourage research and partnerships with leading westerns universities.

(14). Increase educational exchanges, work internships and missions for Libyan youth with well developed nations.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

And now I turn to Libyan Foreign Relations:

- (a). Libya's relations with the rest of the world must be based on mutual respect & international law.
- (b). Libya respects and appreciates NATO members commitment and help in saving Libyan lives. I recommend that a trust fund be established with Libyan money to repay NATO members for a portion of the cost of the execution of the war. This will eliminate any doubt, about a NATO member's future relations with Libya and any perception of exploitation or undue influence.
- (c). I look to our Libyan Ambassadors and embassies to be a model – well connected in the environment they operate – Must have great knowledge of local languages, culture, education, business, economics and politics.
- (d). Libya must have secure borders and the means to control illegal immigration, flow of drugs, terrorism and weapons.

How can the UK play a role?:

We look to the UK to continue to play a constructive role for the success of the new Libya. For decades Libyans frequented the UK more than any country in Europe. There are thousands of Libyans living in the UK.

We must recognize our cultural and religious differences as healthy. **Libya is an Arab and a Muslim country, and derives its core values from Islam, and will always stand for the rights of the Palestinian people.**

The British and Libyan people have a golden opportunity to become closer partners:

- (1). We need the UK to ease on entry visas for Libyans, seeking knowledge, work internships, conducting business and tourism.
- (2). We need British businesses to partner with Libyans and promote transparency and accountability when doing business in Libya and help us fight corruption.
- (3). We need your help In providing us with the best accounting of Libyan assets in the UK including those under members of the Qaddafi regime and the Qaddafi family.

Thank you for being a great audience.