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Libya's Violent Revolution

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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
COSMOS CENTRE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES
“MOBILIZING FOR DEMOCRACY:
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Mobilizing for Democracy: Democratization Processes and the Mobilization of Civil Society

The project addresses the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in democratization processes, bridging social science approaches to social movements and democracy. The project starts by revisiting the “transitology” approach to democratization and the political process approach to social movements, before moving towards more innovative approaches in both areas. From the theoretical point of view, a main innovation will be in addressing both structural preconditions as well as actors’ strategies, looking at the intersection of structure and agency. In an historical and comparative perspective, I aim to develop a description and an understanding of the conditions and effects of the participation of civil society organizations in the various stages of democratization processes. Different parts of the research will address different sub-questions linked to the broad question of CSOs’ participation in democratization processes: a) under which (external and internal) conditions and through which mechanisms do CSOs support democratization processes? b) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms do they play an important role in democratization processes? c) Under which conditions and through which mechanisms are they successful in triggering democratization processes? d) And, finally, what is the legacy of the participation of civil society during transitions to democracy on the quality of democracy during consolidation? The main empirical focus will be on recent democratization processes in EU member and associated states. The comparative research design will, however, also include selected comparisons with oppositional social movements in authoritarian regimes as well as democratization processes in other historical times and geopolitical regions. From an empirical point of view, a main innovation will lie in the development of mixed method strategies, combining large N and small N analyses, and qualitative comparative analysis with in-depth, structured narratives.

Lybia's Violent Revolution

Emin Poljarevic

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Abstract: Libya is unlike other states in North Africa mainly because of the distinctive arrangement of different socio-economic and political features it combines. This arrangement came into sharper focus in the wake of the recent collapse of its 40-year-old authoritarian regime. What had begun as a series of peaceful protests against the regime's administrative misconducts became a full-scale confrontation between, increasingly frustrated crowds of protesters and ever-more violent regime forces and their supporters. It cannot be denied that the mobilization of Libyan dissidents was inspired by the preceding popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Just days after the collapse of the Mubarak regime, multiple street protests erupted across Libya. Even if one accepts the argument that the Libyan revolt was inspired by events outside the country, however, this does not explain why this popular uprising took such a significantly different path to those of its neighbors. This paper contextualizes the collapse of the Libyan regime by exploring the country's various features and analyzing the mobilization process of different groups of anti-regime activists. The paper further presents a critical understanding of the progression of the mobilization process, the fall of the Qaddafi establishment and the immediate results of the regime change, all of which are considerably different from what has taken place elsewhere in the region.

Key words: Libyan Revolution, February 17, Arab Spring, Qaddafi, National Transitional Congress

Introduction

The 2011 Libyan revolution is a case of a popular uprising against long-term authoritarianism that transformed into a civil conflict and was ultimately decided through the direct military involvement of a coalition of foreign states. This paper is primarily concerned with mapping the progression of the uprising from below. In order to analyze the various aspects of the progression, the paper is divided into five parts. The transitional period is covered first. This includes the most significant events from the initial days of the revolt to the handing over of political control of the state institutions to an elected representative body. The second part deals in a more in-depth manner with the actual evolution of protest events. Much of the focus here will be on explaining how initially the peaceful mobilization of anti-regime activists evolved into a full-scale armed rebellion against the regime's (para) military forces. The third part covers structural

conditions in order to situate the transition period and its main outcomes more closely. This adds to the overall explanation of the dynamic of socio-political transition and a set convolutions produced within a new political frame. The last part addresses the specific actors involved in the mobilization process and in shaping the transitional process more closely.

Periodization of the Transition

There are five major periods of political transition in Libya, stretching from January 13 2011 to August 8 2012. The first period lasted from January 13 to February 14. During this time a limited number of popular protests took place in several coastal cities including Benghazi and the desert city Bani Walid. It was on January 13 that several demonstrations against state corruption took place in several eastern and western cities (Abdel-Baky, 2011). Initially, the regime's response was to tolerate limited demonstrations through which people could critique local institutions or the inefficient distribution of government services. Some of these protests were primarily concerned with the delayed completion of housing projects in the coastal regions concerned.¹ Some groups of protesters in Benghazi and Bani Walid occupied several hundred uninhabited, half-finished buildings, effectively becoming squatters (*Egypt Independent* 2011). Qaddafi had even responded positively to their actions, allowing the squatters to continue inhabiting these buildings as their right. The regime reacted quickly to the protesters' demands by putting in place a US\$ 24 billion investment fund, thus directly addressing the housing development crisis (*Reuters* 2011). Despite this immediate government reaction the protests continued, but with a change in their focus and aims.

The January protests rapidly turned into political rallies with an entirely different rationale. Some of the demonstrations were organized by the families of prisoners killed in the 1996 Abu Salim prison massacre (HRW 2003; Reuters 2009; Dziadosz 2011). The regime became increasingly violent in its responses to demonstrators and thus provoked even greater grievances, primarily in Benghazi where the anti-regime protests were most vocal.

The second period in the transition period started on February 15 when the largest series of demonstrations took place. Such events had been virtually unheard of during the 42-year-rule of army Colonel Mu'ammar Qaddafi (d. 2011). Benghazi became the eastern base of the anti-regime protests, as it represented a long-time rival to the central power in Tripoli in the west. However, it was not the only site of popular protest. Major cities in the west, including Zawiyah, Misrata and even the capital Tripoli all experienced large-scale anti-regime demonstrations in mid-February 2011. What set the east and west Libyan cities apart was the regime's preparedness for such popular unrest.

¹ Some 540,000 housing units were planned and expected to be completed by 2010. See "Libya's path from desert to modern country – complete with ice rink", *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 July 2010.

The Qaddafi regime anticipated some public disturbance in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts. It is thus important to situate these mid-February protests in the wider context of regional events. These public protests were in fact directly related to Tunisian and Egyptian mass-demonstrations and the fall of the authoritarian regimes in these countries. It can be argued that the fall of Egypt's authoritarian regime on February 11, only four days before the modest start of the Benghazi protests, had a strong impact on popular perceptions of the effectiveness of mass protests against a repressive regime.

The third period started on February 17. As the protests and regime responses spiraled into violent confrontations, the security forces and disorganized groups of demonstrators started to re-group and strategize the continuing conflict. Initially, disorganized groups, usually made up of a couple of hundred demonstrators, managed to incite larger crowds of people to join the violent clashes with the regime forces in the eastern urban centers. The protesters started to raid local security forces' headquarters, thereby accumulating weapons and ammunition. The regime quickly blocked all social network sites, Al-Jazeera, youtube, and other Internet-based media outlets. At this point, the revolutionaries resorted to wireless communication technology. GSM mobile and satellite phones became by far the most important devices in coordinating the revolutionaries' actions throughout the country.

In the latter half of February fatalities among the protesters in Benghazi reached between 300-400 people, while the government forces counted more than 150 casualties (FIDH 2011; Schemm 2011). Violent clashes then spread quickly to the capital, Misrata (the third largest city), Ajdabiya and other cities. Within days several important government officials had resigned from their posts and joined the opposition. Among the most important names were Qaddafi's Justice Minister, Mustafa Abdul Jaleel (February 21) and Interior Minister Abdul-Fattah Yunis (February 22), who was also an Army General and went on to head a large part of the opposition forces. These defections seem to signal a turning point in the coalescence of the opposition and ultimately resulted in the formation of the opposition's coordinating body, the National Transitional Council (NTC) on February 27 (Abbas and Blair 2011).

As the civil conflict progressed the international community expressed its concerns for the safety of the civilian population in the east of the country through the United Nations Security Council, as Qaddafi's forces and loyalists rapidly gained ground in the conflict. The Security Council, on the initiative of the U.S., UK and France, drew up a resolution which would allow the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya in order to alleviate the immediate suffering of the civilian population (see Fahim *et al* 2011). UN (Security Council) resolution 1973 was thus approved on March 17, at which point U.S. and French war ships in the Mediterranean started to bomb the advancing Qaddafi forces on the outskirts of Benghazi, allowing the rebels to advance

towards the west (United Nations 2011). Even though resolution 1973 was primarily concerned with establishing a no-fly-zone over Libyan territory, its primary effect was to give NATO forces legitimacy to bomb Qaddafi forces at any time and any place.

In the aftermath of the conflict it may certainly be debated whether the military engagement in Libya was pre-planned to remove the rogue Qaddafi regime and replace it with a friendlier regime, to protect the civilian population, or simply a political step to assist the democratization of Northern Africa.² Whatever the underlying motives for the involvement of foreign military forces in the Libyan civil war, the open war between Qaddafi's forces and the revolutionary forces under the coordination of the NTC effectively ended on October 23, 2011 (Saleh and Rohan 2011).

The fourth period of the transition is that between the end of the conflict in October 2011 and the parliamentary elections in July 2012. This period is perhaps the most vibrant in terms of the democratization process. Multiple political parties, media organizations, civil society groups and civil rights associations were formed, all in a near total absence of any particular judicial or political framework. At the same time, during this period high levels of tension and insecurity could also be observed, but also hope and innovativeness among many of the non-violent activists (Parker 2011; IRIN 2011; *Foundation for Future* 2011).

The fifth period stretches from the parliamentary elections of July 7 2012 to the official power-transfer from the NTC to the newly elected Libyan parliament on August 8. The period is marked by the end of the civil conflict between Qaddafi forces and NTC supporters. The campaign period saw between 2500 and 3000 (about 500 female) candidates for 120 independent seats, 142 registered political parties (ca. 1200 candidates contesting 80 seats), for a total of 3700 – 4200 candidates contesting 200 assembly seats (Coker 2012; Khan 2012). In accordance to the population distribution, western Libya is allotted 120 seats and the east the remaining 80 seats. This is controversial and is likely to continue to fuel already existing grievances and a sense of injustice directed at Tripoli. Voices among prominent tribes in the east have already articulated their desire to establish an independent entity and adopt a federation system for the new state. Even if this regional contention is still under debate, it is unlikely to cause the division of the nation. It will continue however to sustain tensions, principally among the political and economic elites (Kane 2012).

² Although beyond the scope of this paper it is worth noting that NATO's Libyan involvement can be linked to the military organization's intervention in Kosovo against Serbia and its military infrastructure. In Kosovo, NATO airstrikes enabled the Kosovo-Albanian forces (UCK) to capture most of the territory of Kosovo. This ultimately allowed Kosovo-Albanians to declare independence in 2008. Subsequently, the elected Kosovo government was extraordinarily forthcoming on the U.S. security demands. I argue that the same logic drove the military intervention of foreign powers during the Libyan civil war, based on similar expectations of access to strategically located natural resources and winning an important political ally in the region.

In the wake of these five periods of transition and the beginning of a new phase of a democratization process we see tensions between tribal elites from east and west (Cyrenaica and Tripolitania). Various militias are linked to these elites, creating much insecurity within the country. In a worst case scenario this could cause a temporary or perpetual state of paralysis, particularly if the socio-economic situation does not improve for the key social group (e.g. long-term unemployed youth) (see Dittrich 2011). Despite the successful election of the National Conference which represented the first elected Constituent Assembly, the process of transition is still incomplete (IRIN 2011). This initial phase of the transition period was concluded with Abdul Jaleel's ceremonial handing over of political authority to the newly elected Libyan parliament on August 8, 2012 (*BBC News Africa*, 2012). Despite this, the chances of successfully placing Libya on the right track soon is doubtful in light of the surrounding complexities.

Protest

From the late 1990s on the Qaddafi regime made attempts to restructure the "institutional" framework of its domestic rule. The turning point in this "reform" process came in late 2003 when the regime announced it was to abandon its weapons of mass destruction project. This effectively meant that Libya could re-establish foreign relations with the U.S. and the EU (*BBC News* 2003; UN Press Release 2004). In the following years there was a surge of international interest in Libya's economy in general and its oil reserves in particular. In 2004 Amnesty International (AI) was allowed to visit the country for the first time in 15 years. Claudio Cordone, the head of the AI delegation, stated that he was "pleased with the unprecedented access we were given to the Libyan authorities and others, particularly to prisoners. We look forward to a serious engagement by Libya with a process of accountability for past violations and reform for the future" (Amnesty International 2004).

The AI visit marked the beginning of a domestic "reform" process where human rights were at least considered as an issue to be addressed. Sarah Leah Whitson, the director of Human Rights Watch's (HRW) Middle East division had both praised and encouraged the Libyan regime to improve its policies regarding human rights. "A public assessment of Libya's human rights record in Tripoli would have been unthinkable a few years ago and reflects the expanded space for public discussion in Libya. The government should revise its penal code to allow all Libyans the freedom to have such public discussion without fear of criminal sanction and stop jailing those who express criticism of the government, including Jamal el Haji (Human Rights Lawyer)" (HRW 2009; see also Amnesty International 2010).

In the summer of 2007 Qaddafi decided to reform the state bureaucracy

by laying off more than a third of the entire state-employed administrative force (in total 400.000 people). All those affected by this large downsize would receive full pay for three years. The unemployed would also have the possibility of receiving a state subsidy should they decide to start their own business. This radical reform effort appears to denote Qaddafi's attempt to modernize the Libyan economy and diminish the state's dependence on oil revenues (Reuters 2007). Furthermore, in 2007, shortly after Qaddafi released a team of Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor from an eight-year prison term for allegedly infecting over 400 young children with HIV, Libya was admitted to the UN Security council as a non-permanent member (Kaplan 2007). This was another major turning point in Libya's foreign relations.

With regard to the domestic reform process, in 2008 Qaddafi himself made a noteworthy remark, which could be interpreted as self-criticism concerning the increasingly publically criticized corruption of the civil administration. In a public speech he declared his wish to abolish local (presumably regional or city) administrations altogether, thereby enabling the distribution of state earnings directly to the population (Pargeter 2010). As noted before, the radical reorganization of the state bureaucracy was perhaps a significant sign that the regime had real intentions to reform the socio-economic basis of the state. During this period a large number of Libya's university graduates were sent by the state to EU countries to complete post-graduate studies in exclusively natural science disciplines (e.g. geology, chemistry, biomedicine etc.) (interview nos. 1, 2, and 3).

As outlined, the gradual and radical change in the Libyan polity had been ongoing since the late 1990s and certainly had an effect on the public's perception of the reform process, and perhaps most of all on the people's expectations as to its development (see *BBC News* 2006). During the pre-revolutionary period several public demonstrations took place.

For instance, in the summer of 2000 a spontaneous and brief eruption of anti-regime violence followed a football game in Benghazi. When Saadi Qaddafi's (Mu'ammarr Qaddafi's third eldest son) Tripoli-based soccer team made an apparently fraudulent attempt to win a match against the Benghazi-based team of the same name, Al-Ahly, a crowd of several thousand fans stormed the field, interrupted the game, and later spilled out on the streets shouting anti-Qaddafi (family) slogans (Mittelstaedt 2011; interview no. 2). The regime responded swiftly, imprisoning the Benghazi team's management, some of the leading players, and an unknown number of protesting supporters, all of whom were sentenced to long-prison terms and a few of which were even sentenced to death (these sentences were later commuted) (Mittelstaedt 2011). It is important to note that some of the fiercest revolutionary units from Benghazi were organized by soccer fans supporting the local team, who were often seen dressed in team colors (interviews no. 2 and 3). The apparent thrust from soccer

fans also incited the regime to cancel all soccer matches in Libya after the Egyptian uprisings (January 25, 2011), thus limiting anti-regime opposition opportunities to gather large numbers of people (interview nos. 1 and 3). Given the abovementioned notion that the most persistent and frequently displayed public grievances had to do with the regime's massacre of 1200 prisoners in a single day at Tripoli's Abu Salim prison in 1996, it was likely that this point of contention would have heightened the risk of (violent) public protests.

Despite extremely high levels of repression in Libya, the reform process intensified during the mid-2000s. The regime's opening to the outside world and giving in to (international) political and economic pressures also opened the way for domestic reforms (see HRW 2009). Even though these reforms mainly consisted of a change in the regime's official rhetoric, the public's expectations of the regime grew substantially (interview no. 2). In other words, there was an increase in subjective expectations for freedom that became manifest in objective claims-making by the public. This development coincided felicitously with the sudden breakdown of the Tunisian authoritarian system in December 2010.

The very core of the Libyan regime, and for that matter the former Tunisian and Egyptian regimes, had developed a "need" for sustained control over its population. This need refers to the power holders' strong will for power which in turn incited them to mobilize the necessary resources to maintain the *status quo*. In the Libyan case all resources available to the regime were utilized (see Downie 2011). One can argue that the *raison d'être* of security institutions in Libya, as well in Egypt and Tunisia prior to their revolutions, was to enforce the authoritarian regime's sovereignty over politics in the first instance, but also over religious practices, media, modes of public expression and other social activities (see Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Linz 2000). In other words, Qaddafi had used all of his personal influence in order to communicate his requests to the Libyan population. He had utilized all the Libyan institutional capacities and administrative resources as mechanisms of coercion with the intention of forcing citizens to comply with regime policies (for a broader discussion see Davenport 2007). Evidently his efforts were not sufficient to keep the regime in power. Nevertheless, Qaddafi-style totalitarianism had entailed a political culture that it was far more difficult to change. As discussed in the following, the Qaddafi regime, like many other authoritarian governments, did not operate exclusively through sheer force. It focused primarily on creating a sense of fear among citizens. Herein, presumably, one can find a large amount of individual actors who feel that they have more to gain in life by remaining politically passive than by opposing the regime in power.

However, something changed in Libya that disrupted the public's passivity, allowing them to overcome their fear. The Libyan popular uprising in February 2011 can be attributed first of all to a turning point in the growth of the

regime-critical section of the population, and, second, to the precipitous falls of the two neighboring countries' long-term authoritarian regimes. These two status quo disrupting processes contributed to initiate the first period of the transition during which popular demands for improved public services evolved into political claims-making events. These increasingly more demanding events climaxed on February 16 when about 500 people gathered in the central square of Benghazi to demonstrate against the regime. The seemingly well-prepared protesters seemed to have a particular demand, the release of several human rights advocates, including the lawyer Fathi Terbil arrested just days before. The protesters used gasoline-filled bottles as home-made bombs and on this particular occasion the security forces cracked down on the protest first with water cannons and then with rubber bullets, and then resorted to live ammunition (Cowell 2011; *Reuters* 2011b). The security forces were supported by civilians who were identified as Qaddafi loyalists (interview no. 3).

Other cities, such as Bayda to the northeast of Benghazi, developed into demonstration hotspots which attracted the security forces' attention and caused escalating violence between the growing amount of protesters and the police. For instance, as a result of swelling protests and violent security tactics a police station in Bayda was burned to the ground on February 16 (Gebauer 2011). In Benghazi protesters organized a provisional camp in the middle of the city, mirroring the focal protest hub against the regime in Cairo's Tahrir square (Jacinto 2011). The security forces quickly moved against the demonstrators with brutal force. Again, in Benghazi a large part of the demonstrators expressed long-held grievances, with many people were calling for justice for those families affected by the regime's 1996 massacre of prisoners and voicing numerous other complaints against the regime's policies. Aware of the danger the escalation of protests posed, the regime released over a hundred imprisoned Islamists, instantly signaling its increased concern to both the general public and the demonstrators (HRW 2003; ICG 2011; Cruickshank and Lister 2011).

The turning point

The escalating protests and regime violence hit a turning point on February 17 2011, the anniversary of Benghazi's anti-regime soccer rally. This was the day the protesters named the "Day of Rage", again modeling their calls for regime change after Tunisia and Egypt. The importance of this date is emphasized here as it came to be the name the Libyan "revolutionaries" gave to their uprising (The 17 February Revolution), thus stressing the importance of the events that precipitated on that day (*the Guardian* 2011b). It was on this day that the overwhelmingly peaceful protests began to turn more violent, largely in response to an escalation in violence by the security forces and a growing number of violent attacks by Qaddafi supporters (Amnesty International 2011c). Even though the security forces were amply armed, the key in their control of

the protesters had been the organization of Qaddafi loyalists. Furthermore, on February 17 protesters in the eastern city of Ajdabiya intensified their protests, which were met with sniper fire from security agents located on surrounding rooftops (Human Rights Council 2011, 23-26). The regime, anticipating fallout from the events of the day before, warned all mobile phone users through a text message that the state security would use force to disperse any “collective activities that promote public sedition” (see Reporters Without Borders’ report 2011).

The regime seems to have anticipated a substantial number of demonstrations; however, the state security forces were not prepared to deal with the persistent nature of the protests. Added to this, it was possible to see that protests were emerging across the country, yet the mobilization was clearly more extensive in the east. Qaddafi tried to preempt the anticipated domestic protests by frequently speaking against the Tunisian and later the Egyptian uprisings, warning of insecurity and socio-economic chaos. Despite the regime’s media campaign forewarning the Libyan public, the majority of at least the male population clearly did not heed these warnings and many decided to protest against the regime (Weaver 2011). The regime in turn backed up its threats by mobilizing all available means of coercion, initially to secure centers of regime power (i.e. the capital and other urban centers in Tripolitania) and later also the rebellious east.

On the other hand, the regime could not have anticipated the size, frequency and seemingly coordinated character of the protests. In the aftermath of the initial wave several sources from the Libyan opposition in absentia claimed that the actual coordination of the protests was carried out by exiled Libyans, primarily from the UK and Switzerland where the bulk of the Libyan opposition was based (see *Global Voices*, 2011). It became clear that coordinated online call for protests in Libya came on Monday 14 February, just three days after the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt. The regime noticed these signals and intensified its efforts to secure control over the major western cities, including its power-base Tripoli. Subsequently, far fewer urban protest events got out of the control of the regime’s security forces in this part of the country, also due to the fact that the majority of the regime’s supporters were from this region. This combination of reasons resulted in a limited amount of popular protests in the west. Those groups of people who did decide to stage some kind of peaceful protest were quickly disbanded by the overwhelming force of the authorities (ICG 2011). In Cyrenaica the security situation from the regime’s point of view was more precarious. The regime’s security agents focused on targeting key opposition figures. Among those arrested on February 14 and 15 was Fathi Terbil, a publicly recognized lawyer from Benghazi (*BBC News* 2011b).

During the first four days of the protests, some 500-600 people

demonstrated in the two cities in the east; Benghazi and Ajdabiya stood out with the largest crowds of protesters. By Thursday 17 February, three people had been killed, which further incited people to gather and continue protesting. This element is highly important as it publicly demonstrated the regime's willingness to resort to extreme levels of violence to suppress even mild expressions of political opposition (Black and Bowcott, 2011).

The deployment of the army to suppress civilian demonstrations was one of the clearest signs of the regime's brutality. In contrast, neither Tunisia nor Egypt initially deployed military forces against demonstrators. On the 17th, a Thursday, and the first day of the regular two-day weekend, many more people were able to join the initially small protest actions. This day marked the five-year anniversary of the regime crackdown on protesters outside the Benghazi-based Italian consulate that left more than ten people dead. The more than 1000 people strong protest that day had been directed against Italian minister Roberto Calderoli's publically wearing a t-shirt with Danish anti-Islam cartoons (*BBC News* 2006b). The regime's security forces attacked large crowds of increasingly violent demonstrators causing widespread panic and deaths. The immediate consequence of the protesters' deaths was the regime's concern for potential larger protests, this time most likely against the regime. Qaddafi's first decision was to replace his security Minister and initiate an investigation into the protesters' deaths just a day after the events (*Aljazeera* 2006).

Even though the short-range consequences of the regime's brutality did not result in increased numbers of protests, the long-term effects of these events were far more dramatic. This was primarily reflected in the persistency of the public memory of these events, as shown on February 17 2011. The persistency of the collective memory was primarily enabled through the dissemination of massive amounts of information about the demonstration, but also reinforced by previous examples of the regime's brutality (e.g. the Abu Salim massacre, the frequent disappearances of well-known public intellectuals, everyday police brutality, corruption etc.). Also, increased Internet access enabled Libyans to share pictures and stories of these and other events; stories of massacres of civilians and the overall brutality of the regime were published online. This had an important effect on the type of the opposition in the making. It seems that both preemptive and reactionary regime violence were shaping an increasingly violent opposition. For instance, on the "Day of Rage" protesters, apparently in response to the security services' deadly violence, began occupying the government's weapons depots - often adjacent to police stations and military compounds. This was done in order to equip the increasing number of "revolutionaries" (*thumar*), as the opposition activists had begun to refer to themselves.

In the aftermath of this turning point there was increased militarization on both sides. The regime, despite its control of the bulk of the regular Libyan

army, deployed a significant amount of foreign mercenaries. This was considered a viable alternative to replace a number of army brigades which had defected to the revolutionaries (Amnesty International 2011d). From that point on it is hard to speak of activist protests in any conventional sense. The vast majority of demonstrators had instead organized into urban guerillas amassing military equipment and using army tactics in order to force the regime to give up power. On the political side of the opposition, the National Transitional Council (NTC) coordinated the leading opposition figures, consisting primarily of the domestic regime defectors still in the country. The NTC and the main bulk of the opposition forces were based in the city of Benghazi, which came under the control of the opposition early on.

Activists

Who formed the main bulk of the revolutionaries? The vast majority of opposition actors can be divided into four distinguishable groups. First, there were exiled Libyans who actively protested against the Qaddafi regime for years in both the EU and the U.S. (see Ahmida 2012). These in-absentia activists played an important role in the early stages of the popular uprising as they communicated with their families, friends and other activists in Libya. Since the Qaddafi regime tightly controlled the Libyan state media, the exiled opposition played an important role as information hubs for the domestic opposition. Through this intense (Internet-based) communication the exiles conveyed unfiltered information on the ongoing revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.³ This seems to have helped to boost the morale of the anti-regime activists (interview no. 1). Moreover, the role of the opposition abroad was also operational in phase two of the transition. For instance, several leading members of the organized opposition had resided in the U.S. since the 1980s, where they created the National Front for the Salvation of Libya under the guidance of Ibrahim Sahad. The majority of the organized opposition, including Sahad, were former Libyan diplomats, government and military officials. Several sources indicate the Front worked closely with the NTC in establishing independent communication networks for coordinating the revolutionaries' actions against the regime very early on (Elkin 2012; interview no. 2).

Second, a part of the domestic opposition consisting of defected government officials, including some high-profile figures such as Mustafa Abdul Jalil (former Minister of Justice), Abdul-Fattah Yunis (Minister of Interior), Mahmoud Jibril (former head of National Planning Council of Libya, an inter-governmental body set up by Saif al-Qaddafi to introduce a neo-liberal economic system in Libya), Ali Essawi (former deputy foreign minister), a late defector and Qaddafi's close aid Abdel-Salam Jalloud, as well as several other

³ According to the data from the World Bank report over 10% of Libyans reside abroad, which is a disproportionately large figure compared to similar countries in peace time (WDI 2010).

important personalities such as the symbolically important Ahmed al-Senussi, a great-nephew of King Idris released from prison in 2001 after being jailed for more than 30 years. Al-Senussi lent the NTC and the opposition further legitimacy in the face of increased violence in the Qaddafi regime, which was progressively losing its grip on the Libyan people and territory. The main bulk of NTC members were thus organized by former government officials, well-educated émigré opposition figures and traditional tribe representatives. In the initial stages of the revolutionary events, primarily in the east, the NTC succeeded in establishing and legitimizing an alternative “government”. Through this newly established government the opposition leaders could voice their demands directed both at the regime, foreign governments, international organisations, and most importantly voice their support and encouragement to their domestic audiences and attempt to coordinate the mobilization of the masses of anti-regime activists (Bell and Witter 2011). In the third phase the NTC played the role of de-facto government, organizing the first democratic elections in Libya’s history (see *Reuters* 2011c).

Third, the youth section of the anti-Qaddafi opposition made up the vast majority of the revolutionary forces. These youths were and still are generally unemployed young men. The demographic youth boom (15-24 years old) in Libya peaked in 2000, and more than 70% of these young people were unemployed compared to the total employable numbers in the Libyan population (UNDP 2011; *the Economist* 2011). If one considers the pyramid-like population distribution affected by mass-unemployment, where almost 90% of the population resides in urban areas, the social situation is clearly highly volatile. The volatility in Libya rose to a degree where - despite high levels of state repression and intimidation - the population rebelled. The environment of regional popular uprisings added important moral incitements to the anti-regime protests. This can be situated in an historical perspective according to Jack Goldstone, who argues that any social environment enduring “youth bulge” is more likely to experience more socio-political volatility in comparison to a society not experiencing this phenomenon (Goldstone 2002). The above-mentioned state restructuring process caused deepening unemployment starting in 2007 which in turn contributed if not to economic hardship then at least to political restlessness among a major part of the population (see ICG 2011b). The spontaneous protests of young men initiated through and by soccer matches demonstrated this volatility well in Libya. In other words, housing challenges in the already highly urbanized Libya became another point of friction between youth and the regime. In this traditional and conservative society, marriage was encouraged and a virtual necessity if people of opposite genders were to cohabit. When the regime failed to meet housing demands this further fuelled the anti-regime mobilizations, now assuming an increasingly violent profile (interviews no. 1 and 3).

Fourth, women represented an important part of the popular protests

despite their seemingly low-profile activism. As Libya is a conservative Muslim society the intermingling of the sexes was limited during protest events (see also OECD 2009). For instance, women were the primary initiators of early protests in the first phase of the transition. Their principal demands concerned the whereabouts of their relatives' bodies killed in the Abu Salim massacre in 1996. Many of the kin of political prisoners took this opportunity to seek information about their incarcerated husbands, brothers, and sons held in state prisons (interview no. 3). During the third phase of the transition women did not participate in violent clashes, but still played a key role in supporting the anti-regime forces with medical and food supplies. Many of the women sold their gold jewelry in order to finance purchases of weapons and other supplies (ICG 2011b). Due to a deep-rooted culture of honor with regard to gender roles in Libya, women seem to have been frequent targets for the regime forces during the civil conflict (Wueger 2012). This further antagonized the anti-regime activists, adding to the existing hatred of Qaddafi and the old power establishment. This can be added to the context and circumstances under which Mu'ammar Qaddafi was captured, or rather lynched by the armed masses, and killed.

Demands

The popular demands of the demonstrations that took place from early 2011 until the end of power handover by the NTC to the newly elected parliament clustered around three issues: a) the improvement of government services (e.g. by ending systemic corruption), b) calling for justice for the massacres of prisoners in 1996 (similar claims were aired by other protesters requesting the government to provide justice for past misdeeds), and c) gradually evolving calls for "the fall of the regime", including the demands for the establishment of a democratic polity in Libya. The progression of protesters' demands from popular calls for improved state services and economic accountability to direct political requests and regime change is similar to the progression of protests in both Tunisia and Egypt.

The regime responded to the first set of demands by specifically dealing with the acute housing shortage throughout the northern provinces. Other sets of demands dealing with calls for justice for previous security incidents were not however responded to in any substantial way. Instead, the regime felt threatened by the increased politicization of protests and thus initiated a media campaign in order to discredit the activists. Moreover, the civilian security services began to be supported by the army in policing the protests; this continued to the point when the activists turned into outright rebels (interviews no. 2 and 3).

The evolution of initially modest popular protests over the course of a relatively short period of time (January-February) seems to have been highly

influenced by the popular revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya's immediate neighbors. The similar spirals of demands originally addressing corruption and the authorities' ineptitude quickly developed into political demonstrations demanding regime change in these countries too (ref.). If we compare the most vocal demands of the popular protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya at the height of their respective revolts we see that calls for dignity, freedom and justice through the deposing of repressive regimes are the most frequent (*Aljazeera* 2011). There were instead very few calls, if any, for more job opportunities, improved economic conditions, better education or other similar issues invoked as primary causes of the revolts (Michael 2011).⁴ With regard to the Internet as an important "public" forum for airing demands, it can be argued that the initial low cost of participating in online regime dissent contributed to the widespread diffusion of claims-making. The claims made online were usually broad and based on general grievances with the political system with no or little debate on everyday (e.g. policy) issues. It could be argued that the radical progression of the transformation of the Libyan protests also brought about a radical change in peoples' consciousness, a more profound and long-lasting change than mere regime shift.

Libyan popular protests grew into a popular upheaval that took place in stages throughout January and February 2011, as explained previously. To talk about protest events in the classical sense is therefore meaningless at this point. What was observed on the streets of major cities throughout northern Libya was a relatively brief period of demonstrations. These events were reticent expressions of long-held grievances funneling into mass-demonstrations in the months following the Tunisian revolution and just days after the overthrow of the Egyptian authoritarian president. It is therefore important to note that the spiraling of Libyan protests into civil war took place against the background of the Tunisian and Egyptian public revolts against the authoritarian regimes of Ben Ali and Mubarak respectively.

Furthermore, the anti-Qaddafi opposition, or rather anti-regime groups, seemed to grow bolder as massive amounts of young unemployed men began to join frequent and sporadic demonstrations. Such events were quickly attacked and dispersed by the heavily armed security forces. One major difference between the Libyan revolt and the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt is that middle-class bureaucrats and professionals were largely absent in shaping the core of the cycle of protest and the outcome of the civil war (Lacher 2011).

⁴ It can be argued that the initial causes of early protests in Libya (both in 2010 and January 2011) were delays in housing developments, the authorities' economic mismanagement and accusations of rampant administrative corruption. Nevertheless, when the political claims started to be made by the protesters social demands turned into far more radical requests – i.e. replacing the entire political system.

Protest forms

It is difficult to speak meaningfully here of any lasting protest campaigns, strikes, petitions or the like due to the lack of organized groups in Libyan civil society, as such groups are usually the instigators of such collective actions. Qaddafi-prompted local revolutionary councils, for instance, essentially functioned as public information hubs where regime informants could pass relevant information on to the *mukhabarat* (state security), but also where people received relevant information from the regime. Most importantly the local councils represented a symbol of Qaddafi's ideological construct (*Jamahiriyah*) where people were, at least symbolically, offered the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes directly concerned with their immediate surroundings.

The regime's violent response to initially peaceful protests in the urban centers across northern Libya following the fall of the Egyptian regime resulted in more violent anti-regime mobilization. The regime's uncompromising stance towards demonstrators instigated an escalation in the protesters' use of violence. Even though the initial lack of a unified opposition caused massive confusion among the protesters, the rapid escalation of violence between the regime authorities and anti-regime activists, the outcome of the first days of the revolt (i.e. 15-18 February 2011) necessitated the coordination of opposition efforts.

Initial high-level defectors from the regime contributed much needed political and military leadership, which in turn facilitated much needed logistical knowledge in creating an opposition structure within the increasingly violent conflict. Moreover, it seems that the availability of Internet connections and other information technology devices (e.g. mobile and satellite phones, radio etc.) further met the need for inexpensive modes of information dissemination and the coordination of political and military activities among the relatively fragmented sections of the political opposition (i.e. the NTC's various branches, its armed wing and the numerous local militias). This is relevant as the main bulk of opposition organizers, if not the outright leaders, were based abroad. The increased availability of Internet services and relatively underdeveloped state mechanisms for controlling information flows allowed opposition groups to communicate, exchange information, discuss and coordinate activities to some extent.

Some evidence for this inability is to be found in the regime's targeted arrests rather than sweeping wave of repression against regime-critical Internet users. For instance, the Libyan security services arrested one of the better-known domestic dissidents, Jamal al-Hajji, due to his regime critical statements posted online. Al-Hajji had been a vocal critic of the judicial process in Libya since working as a lawyer dealing with many civil cases involving the defense of political dissidents (Amnesty International 2011; 2011b). The large amount of critical posts, streams and private forum discussions overwhelmed the state

security's capacity to control, follow up and oversee the anti-regime activities efficiently however. Despite this weakness, the regime kept targeting what they saw as the most precarious elements of the opposition, that is intellectuals (see Freedom in the World (report) 2009).

As Internet communication played a central role in coordinating the progressively more complex operations of the fragmented opposition, it is necessary to address some of its main features. It has been established that the main part, if not all Libyan Internet communications ran via communication equipment (e.g. main servers, cables etc.) based in Tripoli. Cables branched out to the rest of Libya from this point. It was therefore relatively easy for the Qaddafi regime to cut off, or at least limit, cable-based Internet connections in those areas under the initial control of the opposition (i.e. the NTC). An unverified claim as to why this did not happen states that the regime did not possess the necessary software to reconnoiter the vast amount of skype communications (interview no. 3). The skype software was one of the most frequently used information technology devices used by the opposition to communicate with the outside world (interview with dissident in Sweden). Another explanation points to the strategic mistake made by the regime, which included underestimating the opposition's ability to coordinate its military operations, which was correct for the first month of the conflict. Nevertheless, the opposition received much needed aid in terms of communication equipment, training and above all military support from a substantial number of countries and NATO.

In 2010, due to the overloaded Internet cable connections the regime decided to expand the country's Internet capacity by installing VSAT (wireless satellite) connections which would run through Benghazi and thus cover the exponential growth in Internet use in the country. What the regime did not anticipate; however, was that the availability of IT infrastructure would ultimately be used against it. It was no accident then that the Benghazi revolutionaries aimed to take control of key government buildings including the (VSAT) wireless Internet server facilities early on (Harrison 2012). This ultimately meant that the information coming out of Benghazi and eastern Libya could reach both domestic and foreign audiences instantaneously, providing ample information about the advancing Qaddafi forces and effects on the civilian population. It is through this connection that the famous amateur journalist Muhammed Nabbous reported on some of the regime forces' atrocities and the regime's responses to the U.N.'s requests for a ceasefire after Qaddafi's troops stormed Benghazi (*Media Spy* 2011). He created the *Al Hurra* (Freedom) Internet-TV channel on which he and other amateur journalists posted a large amount of video/audio materials and which can still be accessed (Mohammed Nabbous interview, 2011).⁵ Nabbous was killed by a sniper on March 19 2011. Incongruously, he was killed while reporting on the stability of

⁵ <http://www.livestream.com/libya17feb>; see also <http://www.mohamednabbous.com>

the Qaddafi regime's ceasefire in the wake of the UN's authorization of the use of force (see Wells 2011).

As the battles unfolded during the summer of 2011, the opposition forces advanced towards the east with constant support from NATO aerial forces. As Libyans witnessed the fall of Tripoli on August 20th and the killing of Mu'ammār Qaddafi and one of his sons in Sirte on October 20th, it became clear that the opposition had evolved into a fragile political entity composed of different tribes, political and ideological groups.⁶ The NTC initially comprised political figures that had defected from the regime and key members from the local tribes who sought to bring as many Qaddafi loyalists over to their side through various methods. Given the obvious difficulty of establishing trust and reliability in an evolving and highly volatile civil conflict, many people fighting on the Qaddafi side of the conflict (arguably) wanted, but could not, defect due to the high risks of being caught and ultimately killed (interview no. 2; see *CNN* 2011). In such cases family and tribal connections were crucial in communicating their loyalties and plans to defect to the side of the revolutionaries and the anti-Qaddafi establishment (the NTC). This was done for two not necessarily separate reasons: a) in the case of the regime falling and investigations into who was a regime loyalist or revolutionary there would be proof to support their allegiance with the revolt, and b) outright commitment to the cause of overthrowing the regime regardless of the long term outcome of the rebellion.

The focus on a mobilization against a repressive regime outlined in this paper needs to be contextualized in relation to the regime's responses and the dynamics, which, I argue, produced case-specific outcomes. Here the relations between the different state branches (e.g. government, military, security services, economic elites etc.) are immensely important as different aspects of a state converge in the repression of protests and opposition. The Qaddafi regime, despite its power advantage, needed the support of key groups in the society in order to weather an overwhelming popular revolt (see Delacoura 2012). When the regime lost the support of the key Libyan tribes as well as key individuals within the government and the army, the authoritarian structure simply imploded under the weight of the growing opposition coalescence including an important element of foreign military intervention (see BBC 2011).

Several of the revolutionaries interviewed recounted instances where members of the Qaddafi-controlled military actively supplied the rebels with ammunition and information about commencing troop movements. They also spoke of several occasions when rebel spies informed the opposition forces about active regime informants in their midst, which was highly controversial (interview no. 3). Such examples of (counter)intelligence were all important

⁶ Libya is divided into three major regions: Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cirrenaica, comprised of some 140 different tribes of which 30 had some or major influence on the country's politics (Bell and Wittier 2011, 17).

during the course of the conflict and family (tribal) ties were always decisive in transmitting information from one side to the other and vice-versa. Added to this, the military fragmentation of the opposition remained constant throughout the conflict as various cities, regions and even some neighborhoods in larger cities formed independent militias primarily equipped with weapons they themselves had seized from the regime troops and loyalists. The protest form, or rather the internationally assisted civil war, therefore remained violent and its effects clearly affected the remaining transition process.

The Libyan Socio-Political System

Libya has a particularly small population in relation to its territorial size (averaging just 4 people per square kilometer), but it holds the fifth largest oil reserves in the world (OPEC 2012). With a traditionally weak state administration, a tribal-based civil society and a cult-based political system, Libya is a state unlike any of its regional neighbors. These issues played a role at the outset of the civil conflict. For instance, it was clear early on that protests in certain regions of Libya were far more intensive than those in others. As previously mentioned, the regime anticipated more extensive protests in the capital and some other urban centers in the western part of the country. Tripoli, Qaddafi's city of birth Sirte, the important administrative city of Misrata and the desert city of Bani Walid (home of the largest Libyan tribe Warfalla, located south of Tripoli) were under far stricter regime control than other regions in the distant east.

Why was this so? In order to answer this question it is important to look at the Libyan power structure, its internal dynamics and consequences for the revolt. Modern Libyan society has traditionally been loosely bound together through religious and cultural customs that have evolved slowly over the past two centuries or so. Due to its hot and dry climate, lack of immediately accessible natural resources, and lack of abundant water resources, population growth remained unusually low in comparison to the rest of the North African region. It was in the mid-20th century that substantial oil reserves were first discovered, pushing the country's socio-economic development forward.

Due to the post-colonial regimes' historical inability to control the vast territory of the country, previous incapability or unwillingness in the Ottoman Empire's management of the region and subsequent attempts and failures by Italian (and also French and British) colonial projects, society remained politically and administratively fragmented for far longer than it did in Libya's neighboring countries (Ahmida 1994; Obeidi 2001). In fact, "Libyan society has been fractured, and every national institution, including the military, is divided by the cleavages of kinship and region. As opposed to Tunisia and Egypt, Libya has no system of political alliances, network of economic associations, or

national organizations of any kind. Thus, what seemed to begin as nonviolent protests similar to those staged in Tunisia and Egypt soon became an all-out secession -- or multiple separate secessions -- from a failed state” (Anderson 2011, 6). Even though the level of urbanization in Libya is far higher than in neighboring countries, it is thus crucial to consider the central role of clan and tribe, i.e. family ties, in any form of politically-oriented collective action. Libyan civil society is therefore far less ideologically fragmented than is the case in Tunisia, Egypt or even Algeria. Loyalty is given first and foremost to family and its extended leadership (e.g. senior patriarch), which in turn creates a case-specific socio-political dynamic.

For instance, the popular uprisings against Qaddafi regime brought many historically confirmed underlying socio-political contentions to the surface. In the aftermath of the revolution it seems that the fact that Libya is deeply fragmented along the tribal divisions cannot be underestimated (Obeidi 2001). The tribe, albeit in its modern and urbanized form, requires allegiance from its members and this becomes even more significant in times of insecurity and a lack of proper state administration. It must be noted however, that the allegiance of tribe members to their respective group has never been unconditional (interview no. 2).

Sociology professor and MENA region expert Mohammed Bamyeh makes an interesting connection between some historical events and current tribal constellations. Just as during the “Italian occupation of Libya from 1911-1943, contemporary tribal discourse blends with and is clearly subordinate to a collective patriotism, which forms the root of the current national struggle. Since this movement began, Libya’s various tribes have issued numerous statements about the situation, which largely reflect the patriotism that pervades these associations”. An examination of a sample of 28 tribal declarations issued between February 23 and March 9 2011 reveals that the vast majority highlighted national unity or national salvation rather than tribal interests.

These declarations also demonstrate that Libya’s tribes are not homogenous entities, but are comprised instead of diverse members with varying social and economic backgrounds. This reality applies to Libyan society as a whole, which has a 90% urban population and in which inter-marriages across tribal lines are common. Such declarations emphasize the fluidity of tribal solidarities, calling for a more complex understanding of the tribal “system”. For instance, “only 25% of the tribal declarations examined claimed to have been issued in the name of the tribe as a whole. More commonly, the practice appears to have been that declarations were issued in the name of specific sections or locations of a tribe (43%), or alternatively spoke in the name of the tribe as a whole but proceeded to list its locations as if to implicitly exempt those residing elsewhere (32%). Of the total 28 declarations, 39% included a *bara’a* statement, which dissociates the tribe from named relatives

who are high-ranking officials still serving in the regime” (Bamyeh 2011).

Libya’s tribal divisions are usually complemented with sub-divisions (clans) spread over three major administrative (historical) regions. It must be noted that most tribes (and their clans) share many common practices, social codes, and values.⁷ The unification project began immediately after Libya’s de-facto independence. This serious and to a great extent successful attempt to unite the three regions under unitary rule occurred prior to the ascension of the Qaddafi regime following a coup d’état. From 24 December 1951 to 1 September 1969 the monarchical rule of King Idris I (d. 1983) provided coherent political authority throughout what is Libya today. The system had all the features of a parliamentary monarchy. The National Congress (parliament) comprised of tribal representatives and supported by the occupying British authorities elected Idris, previously a provincial leader of Cyrenaica (east region) monarch, thus unifying the three regions under his rule.

King Idris, who was of Algerian descent, derived much of his legitimacy from the Senussi religious tradition established by his family, one of the most influential reformist movements and originating in the eastern city of Bayda. The Senussi religious tradition is embedded in grassroots organization. Based on a specific interpretation of Islamic tradition, it gathered a large amount of followers throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. Its leaders and members preached rebellion against Ottoman rule and later led much of the armed resistance against the Italian colonial authorities. The movement thus developed a tradition of resistance to foreign authority, establishing a positive reputation in terms of civil society activism, religious tradition and political leadership. It was therefore no surprise to the population of the three regions when a senior member of the Senussi family was elected king. Among others, one of the most important historical figures in Libya’s contemporary history was Umar Al-Mukhtar (d. 1931) a resistance leader during the Italian occupation from 1913 to his death and a dedicated member of the Senussi movement.

The Senussi religious and political tradition was generally considered as an appropriate method to bridge tribal differences and solve inter-tribal disagreements (McGuirk 2007). This was the solution attempted in the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, with the hope being that a federal state arrangement headed by a representative(s) of a respectable political tradition would unify various tribes and disparate regions. In the progression of country’s inconsistent institutional development the discovery of massive oil

⁷ *Regions:* a) Tripolitania, b) Cyrenaica and c) Fezzan. *Major tribes:* Al-Awager, Warfalla, Tarhona, Wershifana, Al-Fwatir, Awlad Busayf, Al-Zintan, Al-Rijban, Al-Awagir, Al-Abaydat, Drasa, Al-Barasa, Al-Fawakhir, Al-Zuwayya, Al-Majabra, Al-Msmare, Al-Qaddadfa, Al-Magarha, Al-Magharba, Al-Riyyah, Al-Haraba, Al-Zuwaid, Al-Guwaid, Al-Hutman, Al-Hassawna; Toubou, various Tuareg tribes, Al-Zuwayya; Toubou.

reserves in 1959 contributed to a significant change, if not in its course, most definitely in the dynamic of the progression of state development. A new urban and economically prosperous middle class emerged as the primary civil opposition to the policies of the King. The primary concerns of the emerging middle class appear to have been King Idris' failure or rather his inability to integrate this developing element of Libyan civil society into the decision-making mechanisms of the state (e.g. the National Congress). Other concerns connected to the overall grievance of political exclusion included inequality in the distribution of wealth, rampant administrative corruption and inadequate public services, all of which contributed to the crisis of the king's political authority (Takeyh 2000; Anderson 1986). It is interesting to note that many of the grievances voiced against King Idris' regime were echoed during the latest popular revolt. The central difference was the protesters' critique of the cult of Qaddafi and the institutionalized state repression of political opposition.

It was on September 1st 1969 that the 27-year-old Colonel Qaddafi, together with 70 officer colleagues from the Army, took over the government without meeting much resistance. These men were all members of relatively disadvantaged (small) Libyan tribes, as well as critical urban middle class professionals and thus part of the politically disadvantaged population. The aged King was deposed and Qaddafi proclaimed Libya an Arab Republic (ref.). Qaddafi seems to have been inspired by the 1952 Free Officers' "revolution" in Egypt and its transformation from a monarchy to a republic. The entire process of the coup d'état in Cairo was emulated by the Libyan Free Officers who hoped to create a socialist style political system, well anchored in Arab nationalism, and thus produce national unity and subsequently (total) political control. Qaddafi's political project gradually evolved into a totalitarian-style state where the leader used popular rhetoric combined with ruthless repression to control all elements of civil and political life. State institutions remained underdeveloped, viewed as potential hotspots of opposition, and were left to deteriorate as Qaddafi disbanded the (tribally based) National Congressional Council. Nevertheless, tribal belonging and traditional values persisted and were utilized thoroughly by the regime. For instance, direct interpersonal dealings came to dominate domestic administrative procedures, allowing a great amount of corruption and personal favoritism to dominate governmental practices. At the higher levels of government, Qaddafi would personally communicate with a limited number of representatives who would oversee and follow up all political decisions and their implementation (see Obeidi 2011).

In 1977 Qaddafi made an innovative attempt to institutionalize these inter-personal relations by integrating them into a political system he dubbed *Jamahiriyah* ("self-rule of the masses"). This system was supposed to be an innovative program enabling Libyans to self-apply a set of (Qaddafi's) governing principals which may be described as a form of direct democracy.⁸ In

⁸ Qaddafi authored a text explaining his ideas to the nation entitled the *Green Book*

this effort, local popular councils (Popular Social Committees) were created to deal with neighborhood issues such as arbitration between individuals, land distribution, and a form of representation of communal interests at the regional and national levels of authority. In reality however, the system of local councils was based on the personal interests of a select few (usually local representatives sympathetic to the regime) who were supported by the Qaddafi regime and who could protect the regime's interests in return for various kinds of benefits (e.g. housing, building permits, employment etc.). The councils were in effect the regime's control mechanisms at the local level, safeguarding it from opposition (Takeyh 2008, 160). Moreover, the committees protected their interests by preventing any regime opposition in their own ranks that would render them liable to sanctions from the regime (e.g. violence, imprisonment etc.). This primitive form of neopatrimonial rule designed by Qaddafi himself backfired in a situation where the overwhelming majority of the population gradually came to consider this form of authority both inefficient and ultimately illegitimate.

The role of the military also shifted over time as power struggles between various military officers increasingly threatened Qaddafi's control over the government. There are four known incidents where army officers were implicated in attempts to overthrow Qaddafi. This increasing threat from within the ranks of the regime led Qaddafi to purposefully weaken the military by creating parallel (para-)military structures with elite brigades, all of which were controlled by his immediate family (Barany 2011, 34).

It can be argued that Qaddafi's repression relied both on cultural and (state) institutional components, including patron-client networks. Qaddafi utilized the potential of networks and institutions to his advantage by making any form of internal opposition highly precarious (see Linz and Stepan 1996 on sultanistic regimes). Other socio-political peculiarities (e.g. tribal and regional diversity and an economy based on oil production), inter-tribal distrust and the perpetual power struggle between the major tribes all contributed to the concentration of power in Qaddafi's hands. Combined, these factors contributed greatly to an individually-based repressive political system. It can therefore be argued that the system's irregularity before the February 17 revolution was both its strength and its weakness. Nevertheless, the intricacies of the inner workings of the regime throughout the four decades of Qaddafi rule remain unknown and out of the bounds of scholarly research, and therefore hard to properly explain.

Others have attempted to tackle the regime's intricate structure, but have only been able to speak of outcomes, not mechanisms. "The structure, mandate and reporting lines of Libya's various security agencies described above, including the *Kata'eb* and the Revolutionary Committees remain unclear to outside observers. Transparency and accountability mechanisms are limited to an extreme. This amorphous system, in the Commission's view, reflects a purposeful policy to obfuscate responsibility as well as to minimize any threat

to the central control of Colonel Qadhafi himself. The most important characteristic of these security organizations is that they are neither subject to institutional political control nor to control by the public but have been controlled exclusively by the Revolutionary Leadership led by Colonel Qadhafi” (Cerone 2011, 790). Ultimately, Libya came to be a militarized state practically under the personal ownership of Qaddafi and his family. He had succeeded in coopting all levels of civil society that could potentially challenge his regime. We can thus see that the traditions of tribal mediation, deliberation, communication etc. were totally subordinated, if not entirely destroyed, by the regime.

In terms of the impact of the regime’s repression we can mention another example from the late 1980s. This is when it became clear that Qaddafi had failed to institutionalize his vision of *Jamahiriyah*, causing his efforts to control the state and society through ever more repressive strategies. This tightening of authoritarian control provoked the formation of a loosely connected opposition group among the more religious layers of society in Cyrenaica, awakening its Senussi traditions (interview no. 1; see also Cruickshank and Lister 2011 for further examples of Islamization from below).

It can therefore be argued that a byproduct of this Islamic awakening was the formation of a violent Islamist opposition. In the early 1990s, when many of the Libyan mujahideen returned from the Afghan-Soviet war, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was formed and attached itself to a growing violent Islamist trend. The same period saw the rise of violent opposition in both Algeria and Egypt. The LIFG’s original goal was to depose the Qaddafi regime and establish an Islamist government. Between 1995 and 1998 the LIFG waged low-intensity guerilla-style war against the Qaddafi regime several times, attempting to assassinate him (see Ashour 2012). During the same period the already established Libyan Muslim Brotherhood had further developed its infrastructure, but never challenged the regime through violent mobilization. The increase in regime repression also incited a tribal rebellion by Libya’s largest tribe, Warfalla, which challenged the regime and the biased distribution of power. In sum, these disruptive events placed increased pressure on the regime to address these various forms of dissent.

The regime had first responded by beginning a campaign of social and educational Islamization programs throughout Libya, a move which took much of the edge away from the Islamist opposition. The regime increased funding for mosque-run social programs and religious education, and established a national network of Islamic study circles. Moreover, the regime initiated targeted repression tactics which saw the security forces arrest, kill and incapacitate the entire LIFG network. This effectively ended the LIFG’s campaign of violence in 1998 (Ashour 2012). Important figures from the violent Islamist movement who had survived the conflict with the regime were integrated into the work of the

NTC, which considered the LIFG's more pragmatic activists long-standing dissidents and thus a significant asset in terms of their organizational and military capabilities during the civil conflict. For instance, Abdelhakim Belhadj, an Afghan veteran who had fought with the *mujahideen* against the Soviet occupation in the late 1980s, was appointed as the highest leader of the now defunct Libyan revolutionary army. In 2002 he was detained by the CIA in Malaysia and extradited to Libya, where he was imprisoned for seven years before his release in 2010 as part of a de-radicalization process in the country. He is today one of the leaders of the newly formed Islamist "Homeland" party, which can be ideologically placed to the right of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁹

During much of the 2000s, the Muslim Brotherhood's political activism seemed to have melted into the regime supported Islamic social networks where the group remained socially active, but politically dormant, until the outbreak of the 2011 revolt.¹⁰ In the post-revolt elections the MB became the second largest party represented in the parliament winning roughly 25 percent of the votes (see Eljarh 2012; Gumuchian and Hadeel, 2012; Salem and Kadlec 2012; Kirkpartick 2012).

Regarding the rebellion of the Warfalla tribe in 1993, this had been suppressed partially through targeting the key individuals in the tribe who seemed most critical of Qaddafi's rule. However, by far the most effective regime strategy to curb the Warfalla rebellion was to include a greater number of its representatives in the political system and thus increase economic benefits for the majority of the members of the tribe. At the end of 1990s it was obvious that Qaddafi was keen to include the Warfalla (and Maqarha) tribe(s) in many official institutions, albeit with certain reservations regarding the military. In order to prevent, or at least discourage, any future eruption of discontent, in 1997 the Libyan equivalent of a representative body (the General People's Congress) passed the decision on the "code of honor" (see UNHCHR 1997). This effectively meant that any socio-political opposition to the regime with or without "tribal" implications would result in collective punishment of that specific tribe, family or/and extended network of the particular person involved in "obstructing the people's authority" (UNHCHR 1997). In practice this meant that any citizen and anyone they were associated with was a potential target for the regime's punitive action. This in turn resulted in widespread public fear and suspicion of any "outsiders", e.g. any person outside one's family circle, tribe, or even close friends. There had been many cases where the families and even the entire tribes of certain detainees had been pushed to denounce, disown, and even accuse their relatives who had been arrested for "plotting" against the State (interview no. 3; see Obeidi 2011).

By the end of the 1990s Qaddafi had increased his personal control over

⁹ <http://wattan.ly>

¹⁰ <http://www.ab.ly/ar/>

the security forces by creating a special elite-military unit named the “People’s Guard”, composed of select loyalists who were personally dedicated to protecting Qaddafi’s family and the regime infrastructure, especially from “internal enemies” (Mattes 2004). This included increasing pressure on both the economic and religious “elites” (Black 2011). Qaddafi’s fear of losing control over economic assets was one of the main issues during the civil conflict, when many of the battles between the revolutionaries and the Qaddafi troops took place around the oil-fields (see Chulov 2011). For instance, during the early days of the revolutionary uprisings a part of the economic sector turned against the regime, which strengthened the opposition substantially. As early as March 2011 the Arabian Gulf Oil Company, the second-largest state-owned oil company in Libya, announced plans to use oil funds to support anti-Gaddafi forces. Islamic leaders and clerics in Libya, notably the Network of Free Ulema – Libya urged all Muslims to rebel against Gaddafi. In turn, the key tribes, Warfalla, Tuareg and Magarha announced their support for the protesters. The Zuwayya tribe, based in eastern Libya, threatened to cut off oil exports from fields in its part of the country if Libyan security forces continued attacking demonstrators. Such economic and collective defections caused great harm to the regime and had a considerable impact on the outcome of the rebellion (see ICG 2011; Small Arms Survey 2012; interview no. 3).

Bearing in mind these considerations it is plausible to argue that the regime resorted to several strategies, often carried out simultaneously, in countering the opposition. Most significantly, in the face of institutional failure regarding the regime’s creation of systematized rule based on Qaddafi’s ideology and/or personality-based rule, the leader resorted (again) to traditional forms of governance, namely the tribally-based councils. Qaddafi therefore sought to “re-tribalize” the Libyan polity in order to utilize long-simmering tensions between various tribes. He was thus able to sanction and rule the powerful tribal regions and urban centers without much organized opposition (see Mattes 2004; Obeidi 2011; 2004). He thus seemed to have reduced the institutional costs of running a large state administration, securing his rule through a handful of trusted people who managed inter-regional/tribal dealings. These dealings were carried out through a strict security system based on the code of honor, tight communal discipline and the threat of harsh sanctions for any opposition to the regime. In this way the Qaddafi regime used all available resources to boost its capacity for control and administrative resources as mechanisms of coercion, all with the intention of making Libyans comply with state policies – total submission and obedience to the leadership.

Qaddafi’s shifting but relentlessly authoritarian mode of rule had several negative impacts on Libyan civil society. Multiple attempts to reform the political and social system were in reality power experiments in ruling strategies to satisfy Qaddafi’s totalitarian ambitions. Experiments with this form of totalitarianism seemed to have resulted in a docile and impotent political culture

among large segments of the population throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s, despite occasional violent flare-ups of Islamist anti-regime mobilization. To clarify, the regime did not operate only through sheer force, but also through creating a lasting sense of fear and suspicion among the general public. It therefore follows that the majority of people felt they had more to gain in life by remaining politically passive. This in turn produced a sense of powerlessness with regard to the authoritarian regime, causing most people to retreat to traditional forms of socialization, i.e. the tribe and the family became the main sources of security, stability and solace (interview n. 2). The tribal networks had remained largely intact despite a high level of urbanization, but these networks assumed another role in the contexts of an increasingly unpredictable political atmosphere. This account of the dynamics of Qaddafi's rule represents a structural framework through which Qaddafi developed his authoritarian system. The complexity of inter-personal relationships could be further developed using network analysis to untangle the intricate web of relations. However, this would not further the explanation of the breakout and shape of the 2011 revolt.

It can be argued that the regime's miscalculation of the protesters' commitment and willingness to sacrifice and persist proved fatal. I believe that the regime's previous experiences with tribal and Islamist rebellions shaped much of their security strategizing, in terms of not considering a non-Islamist driven nationwide rebellion. In the end, the regime relied on the elite's inter-personal relations and tribal alliances, as did the opposing NTC and the revolutionaries. When those alliances and interdependency started to fall apart through the defection of important government officials and army officers, the power structure was unable to sustain its cohesion and resistance. Here, one cannot underestimate the role of international actors in the process of system disintegration. Direct international involvement under the auspices of NATO contributed both to polarization in the Libyan public, but also to defections from Qaddafi's inner circle. When NATO's bombardment of military infrastructure targets prompted the regime to rely more heavily on tribally-based allegiance, the support of loyal tribes to the Qaddafi family was clearly not enough to sustain the old system.

What started as popular protests against bureaucratic corruption and the regime's old ills inspired by the popular revolts in Tunisia and later Egypt developed into an open civil conflict. It is clear that once the barrier of fear was breached (for a significant segment of the population) the (armed) rebellion was difficult to avoid. This was not least due to the regime's resolution to resort to all means to maintain its control. The Assad regime in Syria has shown similar determination and survival skills; yet in a far more complex and sectarian social context. In the light of the above presented arguments we can conclude that the social media's role in the evolution of the uprising was rather limited. "(G)iven the very different trajectory of the Libyan uprising—namely, its rapid

metamorphosis from unarmed protests to armed rebellion to international war—the importance of social media as a catalyzing force for revolution took a back seat. Twitter’s influence paled in comparison to NATO bombs” (Fahim *et al* 2011, A1).

Starting Anew?

During the period of Qaddafi’s rule all meaningful, or rather independent, forms of civil society organizations were prohibited (Clark 2011). In the post civil conflict period we see an extraordinary surge in the development of Libyan civil society. New civil society organizations (CSOs) are mushrooming in the context of the new political system and the lack of any coherent institutional order to regulate the shape and form of CSOs. Moreover, Qaddafi’s 42 years in power severely limited Libya’s most productive generations, those in their 30s and 40s. Most of these individuals are relatively uneducated, inexperienced, deeply distrustful of outsiders (even Libyans from other tribes or regions other than their own), and largely unprepared administer the institutions, or for that matter, civil society organizations (see Anderson 2011). This is perhaps the most precarious element present in the post-election period.

In the aftermath of the civil conflict Libyan civil society stands before new challenges. As noted above, the initially fragmented opposition evolved from disorganized and regional groups of protesters into a relatively coherent coalition with a representative political body which could voice and formulate their collective demands to the regime and the international community. The opposition’s military organization and capabilities were far more ambiguous and hard to control for the representative body (i.e. the NTC) from very early on. For instance, before the parliamentary elections (in July 2011) the NTC sought to dismantle Qaddafi’s military structure, but this in turn destabilized the security situation even further. As we have seen, Libya had long suffered from the absence of a central security and defense authority that could protect the country and its people. The military infrastructure was primarily designed to protect the ruling family and their elite allies.

In the post-conflict period different (armed) revolutionary organizations were supposed to take up the task of maintaining order. However, due to the immanent power vacuum various factions began fighting amongst themselves. Many of these clashes were the result of various groups’ control over resources, institutions, territory, old grudges and power-positioning with the new government (*BBC News* 2011c). The outcome of the disintegration of the country’s security has thus far had the effect of slowing down the process of forming a new government, state institutions, regional integration, and coherent socio-political security. Simmering tensions between the Libyan east and west continue to cause friction among the ruling elites and the newly established

parliament. A federal system of government could address these tensions, and prevent their escalating and jeopardizing the functioning of the emerging political system. There is still much uncertainty regarding the political transition. The complexity of civil society discussed above, unsettled power-sharing issues, and a general sense of societal insecurity in the face of uncontrolled armed militias pose significant obstacles to any prediction about the final outcomes of the mobilization (*Reuters* 2011d; interview no. 3).

Despite obvious challenges in reviving Libyan civil society, all groups agree that the authority of the new Libyan government ought to be based on popular will. This goes for the various Islamist parties and organizations (except for the small fringe of violent militias), liberal and leftist parties, women's organizations, Berber tribes and other groups. For instance, all of the initially anti-Qaddafi activists, and especially those from Benghazi and the east, used the same or similar symbols of resistance. First, there was a widespread revival of the heroic story of Umar Al-Mukhtar's fight against the Italian occupation. Islamists saw this man as an Islamic fighter pitted against foreign non-Muslim occupants, emphasizing his piety and religious devotion. Leftists saw him as an anti-colonial hero fighting for freedom from foreign capitalist domination, while liberals considered him a father of the nation and the greatest Libyan patriot. The irony is that Qaddafi had also venerated the memory of Al-Mukhtar, to some extent at least, naming streets and squares after him.

Second, the distinct flag of the Libyan monarchy was another important symbol under which a new political system was to replace the Qaddafi dictatorship. Even though there was no mention of returning to monarchical rule, the flag was used as a symbol of the continuation of the independent Libyan state that existed prior to the Qaddafi-led putsch. Moreover, one of the most important reasons behind the insistence on establishing a federal system in Libya by opposition groups from Benghazi was the way the monarchy was organized. King Idris was skillful in balancing the different regions' socio-economic interests, not allowing any one region to dominate others. The discussion about this issue is by no means settled and will need to be addressed in the future. It is hard to speculate about any one particular outcome concerning the type of political system we will see in Libya; or indeed whether the rapidly evolving political culture will produce a more representative and pluralistic form of government.

Summary

The Libyan anti-regime masses, representing middle class professionals, intellectuals, former government officials, unemployed urban youths, Islamist organizations and female activists were all involved in toppling the Qaddafi regime in one way or another. Representatives from these various layers of

Libyan civil society are all very much active in reshaping the base of that society now. A high level of urbanization and a relatively small population facilitate the acquisition of many of the logistical components needed for creating a domestic discussion about the various aspects of the future Libyan political arrangement. Media outlets and non-governmental organizations are contributing to massive “democratic” output through which the public feels that it is participating in a meaningful debate over their collective future.

For instance, on February 7 2012, almost a year after the rebellion, the NTC drafted a constitution, which, at the time of writing, is under revision after the election of the General National Congress (elected on August 8 2012). This is the latest constitutional development in a string of constitutional changes dating from Libyan independence in 1951 that took place up to the military-led revolution that replaced the constitutional monarchy with the Constitutional Proclamation of December 1969. In 1977, Libya became a state of ruled by the masses - *Jamahiriyah* - only to be overruled by the mass uprising in February 2011. It remains to be seen however what the new constitutional order will evolve into. The most significant change will undoubtedly be the formation of a civil state with a functioning (in whatever way) institutional framework that will democratize vital decision-making structures.

Regarding the role of the media in the continued transition process we can conclude that ever since the first days of the revolt, when the protesters seized the regime’s local radio stations in cities across Libya, an information revolution has taken place. Anti-regime activists learned early on that they could attract both national and international support through the avid collection of visual digital material of the massive protests in Libya. Protesters usually downloaded digital photographs and videos of the demonstrations, showing the security forces brutalizing and often killing activists. Since no foreign or domestic media were reporting these demonstrations, the activists came to be amateur field-“journalists” aiming to show the brutality of the regime. This can clearly be compared to anti-regime protesters’ documentation of protests in Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and other places.

These efforts played an important role in attracting international support for the activists, particularly in the form of the U.S. and European NATO intervention supported by the Arab League. When the international media finally, after weeks of protests, gained access to the opposition stronghold in Benghazi, they were invited to make use of terabytes of documentation. Information was made available through access to a server in the international pressroom in the "17 February Media Centre" in the old Benghazi courthouse. Because of the careful cataloguing of the material hundreds of international journalists had quick and easy access and verification of sources, and a chance to work in a more in-depth way. In the aftermath of the conflict more than 100 media outlets – newspapers, radio stations, TV stations and Internet news sites

have appeared.

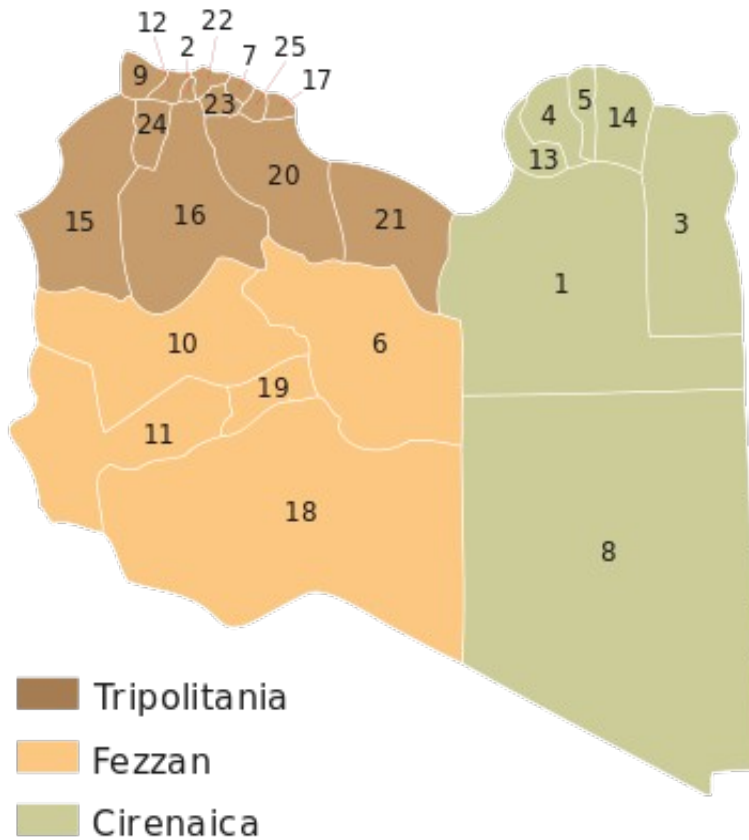
In sum, the factors that were arguably crucial to the eruption of the popular revolt in Libya are the weakening regime, incompetent government administration, disgruntled tribal allies, deeply dissatisfied urban populations, and support from (the important parts) of the international community for the opposition. As with other regional revolts that have taken place in recent time, especially those concerning democratic transitions, political changes will inevitably take time to take root and there will be a “democratization process in progress” for years to come. The domestic political process will be an ongoing one, involving setbacks as well as advances. The sudden occurrence of political setbacks should not be viewed as spelling total failure of the process, but as a series of obstacles that need to be overcome as part of the political transformation to civil governance. This will ultimately have implications for how Libya manifests its new national and political identity.

Situating Libya in the larger regional context we can observe that the Libyan society and state (infra)structure is highly dissimilar to those of Egypt and Tunisia, both of which had relatively well developed constitutional traditions and functioning state institutions, however corrupt. It is for this reason that the transition from authoritarian rule in Libya also includes a delicate process of state building. The country therefore faces more serious challenges than those raised by the task of democratizing the system. While protests in Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt appear similar on the surface, appealing to tenets of patriotism and dignity, they were in reality only able to take hold because of local circumstances that made the demands for popular rule and anti-regime symbolism salient to the population.

Factsheet

Population	5613380 (July 2012 est.)			
0-14 years	32.80%	(Male 1104590 Female 1057359)		
15-64 years	62.70%	(Male 2124053 Female 2011226)		
65 years and over	4.60%	(Male 146956 Female 153776)		

(2011 est.)



[source: cia.gov](http://cia.gov)

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1. Skype interview with a Lecturer at Fatih University (Tripoli) (name withheld), June 12, 2012.
2. Interview with Abdelsalam Al-Misrati (native of Misrata city), Physician and dissident activists involved in post-Qaddafi Libya health policy development. The interview was conducted in Stockholm, Sweden, June 15, 2012.
3. Telephone interview with anti-Qaddafi activist turned rebel from Benghazi, Ali Abdullah, August 9, 2012.