

Planning for New Libya in Post-Gadhafi Era

Jack Goldstone, Charles Cadwell

Abstract

Post-Gadhafi Libya brims with promise, but also with pitfalls. The Urban Institute's Charles Cadwell and George Mason University's Jack Goldstone outline steps Libya should take if it is to make great strides toward democracy and its people are to enjoy their hard-won freedom.

Document date: August 29, 2011

Released online: August 29, 2011

McClatchy-Tribune Information Services, August 29, 2011

Post-Gadhafi Libya brims with promise, but also with pitfalls. Blessed with low-sulfur oil, proximity to Europe, and recent strong economic growth, the country should be poised to move forward. But that's only if the risks of tribal conflicts and the challenges of a very young population and regional divisions can be managed.

As Tito held Yugoslavia together, and the Soviet dictatorship kept dozens of nations under one boot, Libya has been unified under one autocrat for 42 years. That reality allowed outsiders who interacted with Libya to pay less attention to its domestic politics, formal and informal.

The price of inattention, coming due now, is that policymakers in the West are scrambling to acquire the necessary map of interests and personalities, the history of conflicts and alliances that might inform the way forward. Our experience shows that old governance patterns are very durable, notwithstanding aspirations and promises of new governance values.

What other recent post-conflict evolutions also tell us is that outsiders can be enormously helpful, but that enthusiasm for initial leaders and their promises shouldn't get in the way of making the new state's legitimacy a high priority along with support for its capacity and effectiveness. Donor funds can rebuild infrastructure and improve service delivery. But it's more difficult by far to invest in institutions that assure the ongoing legitimacy of the new state. Will all Libyans trust their government to treat them fairly?

Here's what we think our experience in other countries has to teach those advising the National Transitional Council:

1. Security is number one. Security for government installations, banks, and other critical sites is paramount, but so is security for individuals against crime and retribution, and a rebel army is not a suitable force for policing civilians. The remnants of Gadhafi's army and security forces, excluding only officers who ordered their troops to kill Libyans, should be offered places in a new Libyan military and police if they first agree to take at least six months of training in democratic policing. Given the urgency of establishing a police force, the U.N. should offer its training services and temporary staffing support to help the transitional government maintain order and security.

2. Embrace federalism. The Berbers of the south and west, who helped defeat Gadhafi's forces, want their language and culture recognized as primary in their region. The Eastern region does not want Tripoli to dominate either, and tribes there expect some degree of self-government. So building a new centralized regime in Tripoli should not be a goal.

Western donors, oil consumers, and geo-politicians will push to build and support a unified state that can deliver key services and command and allocate resources. Better now would be a federal system based on the regional self-determination needed to ensure broad cooperation and participation in a new Libyan regime. While Egypt benefits from a widely shared sense of "Egyptness," this is not Libya's luck.

3. Elections should not be rushed. Important stabilizing forces, elections must be legitimate, and their results must be accepted by all major parties. However, achieving the agreements and the capacity to hold such voting takes time. Libya's interim government should wait 12 to 15 months before holding national elections.

4. Jobs, jobs, jobs. Like the rest of North Africa, Libya has a large number of young men without sufficient employment. Putting people to work and restoring the war-torn economy will be vital to retaining support for the interim government and the transition to democracy. Infrastructure spending, government positions, and incentives for foreign investment all need to be cranked up to keep young men gainfully employed.

Outsiders have diverse interests requiring coordination, and decisions need to be, and will be, made by

Libyans. But that's no excuse for reducing assistance to only those activities that can find agreement among the new Libyan leadership. A post-conflict development strategy that takes account of existing institutions, that targets all aspects of state capacity — not just immediate humanitarian and technocratic needs — can meet the long-term objectives of Libyans and most outside parties. Adding muscle to institutions that constrain opportunism by new state actors can help Libya avoid some pitfalls of other post-conflict regimes.

If these steps are taken, Libya should make great strides toward democracy. It will not be a perfect democracy — no country is. But if Libya can do as well as Malaysia or Georgia, it will be doing all right economically, and its people will enjoy their hard-won freedom.

Jack Goldstone is the Virginia E. and John T. Hazel Jr. professor and director of the Center for Global Policy at George Mason University. Charles Cadwell is the director of the Center on International Development & Governance at the Urban Institute.

Other Publications by the Authors

- [Jack Goldstone](#)
- [Charles Cadwell](#)

Usage and reprints: Most publications may be downloaded free of charge from the web site and may be used and copies made for research, academic, policy or other non-commercial purposes. Proper attribution is required. Posting UI research papers on other websites is permitted subject to prior approval from the Urban Institute—contact publicaffairs@urban.org.

If you are unable to access or print the PDF document please [contact us](#) or call the Publications Office at (202) 261-5687.

Disclaimer: *The nonpartisan Urban Institute publishes studies, reports, and books on timely topics worthy of public consideration. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Copyright of the written materials contained within the Urban Institute website is owned or controlled by the Urban Institute.*

Source: The Urban Institute, © 2012 | <http://www.urban.org>