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State Department Briefing on Libya

delivered 2 August 2011, Washington, D.C.



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Hello. Good afternoon. I'm Chris Stevens. I got in from Benghazi a couple of days ago. I'm in town for consultations in the Department. Just briefly, I'll say a few words at the top.

I've been in Benghazi for about four months now. We got there April 5th. It was difficult to get in there at the time. There weren't any flights, so we came in by a Greek cargo ship and unloaded our gear and our cars and set up our office there. So we've been on the ground since then. My mandate was to go out and meet as many of the leadership as I could in the TNC. They've got their Council, which is sort of their legislature, and they've got sort of a cabinet. So I've met just about everybody in those two institutions. And then I've gone around and -- with our small team -- tried to get to know other people in the society there. Of course, we operate in eastern Libya, not the part that Qadhafi controls. And the immediate concern when we got there was that Qadhafi's forces had almost infiltrated and taken over Benghazi, but were pushed out by NATO. And since then, the situation has improved quite a bit.



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Real briefly, I'll say that in the last four months, my strong impression is that the TNC are making progress. And I sort of break it down into three areas.

Diplomatically, they've made tremendous progress since April gaining international recognition now from about 30 countries, including, significantly, our own. This helps them in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of their own people, in the eyes of the Libyan people who are still under Qadhafi's rule, and it also helps them in the sense that it increases pressure on Qadhafi.

Financially, they've made progress. And when we got there, they were really in a precarious situation because they didn't have funds to pay for food, medicine, fuel to keep the power generators going to keep the lights on. And since then, a number of countries have come forth and offered loans, most recently Turkey and Qatar and the UAE and Kuwait. And of course, with political recognition, they're hopeful that they'll be able to gain access to the frozen assets around the world.

And then lastly, I would say militarily -- although it's been slow -- they're also making progress gaining territory from Qadhafi. And the way I sort of break it down is there are three battlefronts. There's the Western Mountains, where they've got fighters inching their way towards Tripoli. There's the Misrata front on the coast, where they've not only fought off Qadhafi's forces successfully, but they're also pushing west up the coast towards Tripoli. I understand they're getting close to Zliten, which is a significant town. And then closer to where I am, there's Brega. And they made a push just as I was leaving Benghazi towards Brega, where they're now encountering difficulty with landmines, unfortunately. Hopefully, they can get through those.

Now, I don't want to paint an overly rosy picture because there are also challenges inside the TNC-controlled area, and one of them is security. There was a security vacuum when the regime fell, and they had to stand up very quickly, this organization called the TNC. The police, for the most part, just left their posts because they were afraid of popular reaction against them because they had committed abuses in the early days against the people. So there's hardly any police around, and because of that vacuum, militias started to form and step in.



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And so looking after the security of Benghazi and eastern Libya, you've got a lot of militias and a few police. And this had led to some security challenges that you've already read about and know about, I'm sure. And the TNC is working to address these problems. We've flagged the problems with them. The British, the French, and other diplomatic missions there are sort of keeping the pressure on the TNC to get their arms around the militia problem so that they can provide better security as they try to move forward to Tripoli, and hopefully to Qadhafi's departure.

Thank you very much. I'm happy to take questions.



Mr. Toner: Kirit, go ahead.

Question: Hi. Kirit Radia with ABC News. I had a question for you about the numerous reports of fracturing within the TNC and some different factions that have been potentially clashing against each other, most notably in the case of the security official who was assassinated the other day. I was curious if you had any insight into just how fractured the TNC might be and what the U.S. is doing to help unify them.

Ambassador Stevens: Yeah. My impression is really a little bit different. The TNC really is a reflection of Libyan society. Libyan society is not monolithic; it's made up of lots of different people, lots of groups, different points of view. So this was never a monolithic group that we were dealing with, and I realized that from the start of our mission, and we reported this through channels here. So it's not surprising to me that there are differences of opinion.

The problem, of course, arises when they express their differences of opinion in a violent way. And with respect to General Younis's killing, we really don't know who did it. I mean, they -- I know there are some statements out there, but the TNC has set up a committee to look into his killing and to ascertain what the truth is. So I'm really hesitant to kind of jump to conclusions about whether it was an inside job or a Qadhafi job or anything until we really know.



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On your last point, we have gone in to the TNC leadership with our partners on the ground there and communicated the view that they really need to be careful about maintaining their unity and keep the focus on Qadhafi's ouster. And they understand that message very well and they've told us that they are going to work hard to bring the militias under the control of the security ministry which they've set up and under the army as well. And hopefully that will work.

Question: Do you have any concern that the factions that are within the TNC could weaken it to the point where they aren't able to act in any sort of unified way against Qadhafi -- that would impede their progress or their ability to even provide services as well on both fronts?

Ambassador Stevens: No, because the militias that are troublesome are really quite small. The main militias are working in coordination with the TNC leadership and under the leadership of the defense ministry there. That's the first point. The second point is the militias -- there are any number of them and they sprout up all the time and it's pretty much anytime a few guys get together and identify a name to attach to their group. And oftentimes they work only in a neighborhood context. So I don't see them as posing a huge security challenge right now.

Question: Well -- sorry, it wasn't the militias that was meant. Within the TNC leadership, any sort of fractionalization within the TNC leadership that would impede their ability to either make decisions on behalf of the group or to advance against Qadhafi.

Ambassador Stevens: No, I don't see that as an issue. As I said, the main ones are with the TNC and they're on the front lines not only in Brega but also they're sending fighters out to the western mountains and to Misrata. So they're with the cause.

Mr. Toner: Elise.

Question: Just kind of taking a larger picture, it does seem in the last few weeks that kind of despite their nice plans and papers and proposals and meetings that they're having, that there does seem to be some kind of disarray on the ground. And I think it probably stems from the fact that there's been so little of institutions or any type of government in Libya for so many years that these people are not really used to kind of all working together towards a common goal.



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So are you concerned that despite the façade of that they really have their act together that perhaps they don't? And how can the U.S. help in terms of helping them professionalize themselves? What specific things are you going to do on the ground to help them maintain their unity? And on that note, what is the status of your office? How many staff -- if you can talk, given security concerns -- what kind of presence do you have on the ground, and do you expect to have a more robust presence as you increase your -- or formalize your presence as you --

Ambassador Stevens: Right. Okay. First, it's -- I think it's really important to remember that the TNC sort of emerged out of emergency circumstances back in February, and they tried to set up government institutions in very difficult circumstances -- while they're fighting a revolution, while they're fending off Qadhafi, while they're trying to gain international support. So I actually think they've done pretty well considering the challenges. But your point is correct in the sense that Qadhafi never encouraged institutional development. He did the opposite. He really demolished his government, as you know from your visit there a few years ago. So they are struggling with that.

We and other international partners are trying to help them in various ways. The main vehicle for that is the International Contact Group which meets once a month, and there are discussions about what kinds of technical assistance could be provided to help them sort of buttress their institutions, which, by the way, are meant to be temporary because they weren't elected. They're not considered the elected government. They're meant to be transitional. So there's a sensitivity there.

And then on your last question about how big is our group, we're eight people now. We're quite small, but we hope to get a little bit bigger.

Question: Just a quick follow. In terms of you working with these people and helping them kind of maintain their unity, even though they're the biggest game in town, how much support do they really have throughout the country? Although they're certainly the most well known, would you say that this is an adequate reflection of representation of the Libyan people?



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Ambassador Stevens: Yes, I would. First of all, there's no alternative except for Qadhafi and he is extremely unpopular throughout the country. Second, the TNC has representatives from Qadhafi-controlled Libya on its council and in its government. And they've actually recently increased the size and the representation of the TNC among the western provinces. And they're very conscious of this sensitivity of not being sort of overly dominated by eastern Libyans. So I think they are representative.

Question: Steve Myers. Sir, short of jumping to a conclusion, can you tell us what you do know about the killing of General Younis? The circumstances are very murky, as you know. And what effect have you seen so far in the week or so since that's happened on the military leadership of the TNC?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, I don't want to speculate. All I've seen are a couple of reports, one by the TNC leadership that a Qadhafi-affiliated militia killed him, another by somebody else who said it might have been one of the rebel militias. And I don't really know what the truth is. I think we have to wait and find out.

In terms of the impact of his death on the military leadership in -- among the rebel ranks, I understand that they have selected, or are looking at, a general who is in charge of the Tobruk region in the eastern part of the country, but I don't know if he's been confirmed, so to speak.

Mr. Toner: Mary-Beth.

Question: Hi. I'm Mary-Beth Sheridan from The Washington Post. So can you give us a sense at this point -- what is your sense of how much longer it will -- the sort of conflict is likely to go on before Qadhafi leaves? Three months, six months, a year?

Ambassador Stevens: I wouldn't want to put a date on it, but I can tell you what the TNC hopes to be the sort of end game. Their -- What they envision is increasing pressure on the Qadhafi regime such that more and more of the leadership flee, and such that Qadhafi will give up. And the pressure is political, his increasing isolation; it's financial, and it's even military, as the rebels try to move down closer to Tripoli from the mountains and then up from the coast.



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Question: And if I could follow up -- also, it's been referred that the U.S. had suggested in its talks with the Qadhafi government the possibility of Qadhafi staying in the country. Is that something that you're still willing to offer to them?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, our position is that it's a decision for the Libyan people and their future government where Qadhafi resides.

Question: Camille Elhassani from Al Jazeera English. In your talks with the TNC, have you gotten a sense that they would accept Qadhafi to stay? And then also I have a couple more, but I'll just start with that one.

Ambassador Stevens: That's a highly controversial issue within the TNC right now. And as you've seen, they've flip-flopped a little bit on that. And that's because there are different views, and the leadership of the TNC is trying to be responsive to the street. So I'm not sure they've reached a final decision. The two basic arguments are, one, he should go because if he's allowed to stay in Libya he'll just cause more problems and we'll have to deal with him forever. The other argument is, no, he should be allowed to stay in Libya because it will end the conflict sooner and then we can prosecute him ourselves. And then there's another issue of whether the new government of Libya would turn him over to the ICC, so --

Question: Also, have you been able to travel outside of Benghazi and meet with civil society leaders in other places? And these are the people who are telling you that they support the TNC? Is that --

Ambassador Stevens: Absolutely. We try to get out about as much as possible, so -- and meet with all sorts of people -- tribal leaders, Islamists, NGOs, women, men, all around. So Benghazi, but also we've headed out into the east. Where we don't go, for security reasons, is into the warzone.

Question: Sure. Are they telling you what kind of government they want post-Qadhafi?

Ambassador Stevens: Yep. Democratic, where they have a say in their lives, which they didn't have for the last 42 years.

Mr. Toner: A few more questions. Said.



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Question: Sir, how do you and the other diplomatic missions accredited in Benghazi liaise with the TNC? Do you have -- Do you coordinate your efforts? Do you talk to them on daily basis? Do you deal with them as a government? And would you recommend to the Administration, to the United States Administration, to open up the embassy as soon as possible in Washington so you can have better coordination?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, we talk to them on a daily basis.

Question: Do you coordinate with other accredited missions and so on? Do you --

Ambassador Stevens: We talk to the other missions as well.

Question: To set priorities and so on?

Ambassador Stevens: Yeah, yeah. We -- of course, in the Contact Group, where there are a number of nations and those nations are represented in Benghazi. And we do talk amongst ourselves -- how can we work with the TNC to forward the goals that everybody agreed on in the Contact meeting? So yes, a lot of talk among all of us. And as for their mission here, I understand they're going to be opening up their office again pretty soon.

Question: Thank you.

Mr. Toner: Paul.

Question: Paul Richter with the LA Times. Is the U.S. doing any systematic planning for what happens after Qadhafi leaves?

Ambassador Stevens: Yes. But first, I really want to say that the TNC is also doing planning for the future, and that's probably more important. They have done extensive planning about how to handle the situation in Libya in the immediate aftermath of his fall and then beyond that. It's -- They've done a political roadmap to how they're going to get there, and then they've done very specific sector-by-sector planning. So that process is underway. We and our international partners are working with them in the Contact Group to help them and to give ideas and -- based on our experiences. They're very open to that kind of cooperation. And of course, the UN is very involved and will be very involved in the post-Qadhafi era.



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Question: And how much of a role is the U.S. willing to play? Are you leaving it to the Europeans, or is the U.S. willing to do a substantial role in helping maintain security in the immediate aftermath?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, I think we have a lot to offer, based on our own experiences. And my understanding is that we're going to be doing this as part of a joint effort with other international partners. As I've said, the Contact Group is kind of the venue where this -- these discussions take place and the teamwork is formed.

Mr. Toner: A few more questions. Cami.

Question: I'm just wondering -- this touches on some of the other questions that were asked, but -- and we keep hearing that the NATO militarily -- the mission is in a bit of a stalemate and -- Qadhafi's forces and the opposition forces. And more people are saying it will have to be a political solution. I'm just wondering what the TNC tells you about that. Do they feel the same way? Do they feel that they're also in a stalemate? And if they are looking at a political solution, what specifically are they thinking of?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, they are of the view that they're actually making progress towards ousting Qadhafi, because they, and with everyone else's help, are increasing the political pressure, the economic pressure, the military pressure. So they don't see a stagnant situation. They see movement in the right direction. They're very glad that NATO is a part of this, and they see NATO's continued involvement as essential to protecting them, their people, and they hope it continues.

Question: But did they expect it to last this long, the military involvement by NATO?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, they had hoped that Qadhafi would be gone a long time ago, but they're patient and they're committed.

Question: And so the second part of my question was, politically, what are they willing to do to bring this to a conclusion?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, they're trying to do all they can with the fighting on the various fronts. And they're trying to show the -- continue to show the international community that they're worthy of our support.



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Mr. Toner: [Inaudible].

Question: What percentage of the TNC, this reflection of Libyan society, is now composed of women? Secondly, have they told you how they want to use the billions of dollars they're hoping to get access to? And thirdly, how do you draw the assessment -- or how do you reach this assessment that Qadhafi's demise is an inevitability at this point, beyond that you want this to happen?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, the percentage of women in the TNC is very small. I can tell you that. I'd have to look carefully at the lists of who's in the different structures, but it's very small. I know one TNC woman who's a -- plays a prominent role as head of the legal affairs committee, and she's very involved in the discussions about political planning for the future. Women are more represented in civil society groups there. So that's that. And then can you remind me of the other questions?

Question: Yeah, sorry. The money, the --

Ambassador Stevens: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Question: -- billions in --

Ambassador Stevens: Right. Right.

Question: -- assets that --

Ambassador Stevens: They have specific plans and priorities for how they would spend the money. Generally speaking, they would spend it on their urgent priorities, which are fuel so they can keep the electricity going, and the water pumping. (By the way, they get their water, most of it, from the Great Man-Made River, which is pumped out of desert aquifers in the south. And that all takes a lot of electricity.) And on medical supplies and medication, which they're running short on, and on food subsidies, and on supporting internally displaced Libyans from the West who fled to Tunisia. That's a big issue. So that's how they would spend the money.



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And then on the inevitability of Qadhafi's departure, I don't -- all I can say is that the world is lined up against him and his base is shrinking, and the TNC forces are closing in around him, and so are sanctions and other things. So I think everybody agrees it's a matter of time.

Mr. Toner: Last couple of questions. We'll do -- go there to Jill and then --

Question: Thanks. Just a quick one. There are some reports that some of the military in the TNC actually themselves are carrying out human rights violations. Is that correct? To what extent are they? And how effective are the TNC in terms of controlling their own forces?

Ambassador Stevens: Before I came here, I met with the Human Rights Watch representative who was on the ground in the western mountains and who did the reports on the abuses that she witnessed there, and we had a long discussion about it. And her reports seem very credible to me, and I know that she raised them and Human Rights Watch raised them with the TNC, and we did as well. And the TNC was -- leadership were very troubled by these reports. They have, from the beginning, issued instructions -- or tried to, anyway -- to their military and to the rebel militias fighting on their behalf to respect international law in the way they treat prisoners and civilians. And they're also very sensitive to wanting to appear different from the Qadhafi forces and the abuses that those forces make in the field. And so they have sort of an extra political motivation for distinguishing themselves from Qadhafi. So they got the message, and I'm sure they're looking carefully at --

Question: Well --

Ambassador Stevens: -- making sure it doesn't happen.

Question: But is that a surprise? I mean, some of them are former Qadhafi loyalists who committed abuses under Qadhafi, so they don't just change their tactics even though they might not like working with Qadhafi anymore. They don't exactly change their tactics overnight, do they?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, it's an education process and education takes time -- repetition.

Question: Given that the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Muammar Qadhafi, do you have any idea of who might represent that country at the UN General Assembly this year? Has that been any part of discussions?



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Ambassador Stevens: It's not been part of any discussions I've had in Benghazi. I'm sorry, I don't know the -- don't know.

Mr. Toner: Let's do one quick last question, and then --

Question: How's the help you have been receiving from the fellow Muslim countries in the region? Are you satisfied with it? And also Muslim member of the NATO, Turkey, do you think west and the east are on the same page still?

Ambassador Stevens: Well, the -- I can tell you the TNC is very pleased with the support they're getting from some countries, including especially Qatar, UAE, and Turkey, to name three. They're playing a big role, a positive role.

Mr. Toner: I think that's all we have time for. He's got other meetings, so I'm going let him go. We'll start the daily briefing in just a couple of minutes.

Ambassador Stevens: Thank you.

Mr. Toner: Chris, thank you.

Ambassador Stevens: All right. Thank you.