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**A CADMEAN VICTORY: LIBYA'S
INTRACTABLE STRUGGLE FOR GOVERNANCE**

by

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LIBYA'S INTRACTABLE STRUGGLE FOR GOVERNANCE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explain the factors that contribute to the outbreak and persistence of the civil war in Libya. Libya's tribal and colonial past, the Arab Spring upheaval, and the more recent injection of outside forces are examined to identify the factors most salient to explain the civil war's continuance. It places the war in an international context by examining the role of foreign and regional actors. Furthermore, this thesis explores the ways in which U.S. interests are affected by this seemingly unresolvable crisis, affecting a country that has not featured prominently in international affairs. Finally, the thesis addresses why the United States and other international actors should care about what happens in Libya, what is at stake in the Libyan civil war and why it is important to resolve it, and what steps are most likely needed to do so.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AQIM:	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU:	African Union
EU:	European Union
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
GNA:	Government of National Accord
HOR:	House of Representatives
IS:	Islamic State (formerly the ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham] and ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant])
LNA:	Libyan National Army
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UN:	United Nations
UNSC:	United Nations Security Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis explains the factors that contribute to the outbreak and persistence of the current civil war in Libya. It places that war in an international context by examining the role of foreign and regional actors. This thesis also explores how U.S. interests are affected by this ongoing and seemingly unresolvable crisis in a country that has not typically featured prominently in international affairs, beyond the ability of its former leader Muammar Gaddafi to provoke and agitate world leaders. In other words, it answers: Why should the United States, and other international actors care about what happens in Libya? What explains the catalyst for and protraction of this conflict? Also, what is at stake in the Libyan civil war; why is it important to resolve it; and what steps are most likely to do so?

This thesis begins with a brief examination of Libya's geopolitical position in the region, as an important north-south axis between the Mediterranean and the African heartland and an East-West link between the populous and volatile Middle East and the Maghreb. It then examines the political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to the current crisis, as well as explores the efforts of outside powers to intervene and the consequences of that intervention. Achieving an understanding of the history and context of the Libyan civil war suggests some avenues and strategies for a resolution. This is accomplished by briefly exploring the significance of Libya's major historical eras; examining the role of Islamist factions; assessing the current state of the myriad local, national, and international factions involved; weighing the impetuses and elements of the war's continuation against the contemporary civil war literature; and detailing specifically the United States' involvement past and present. This thesis concludes with a set of factors that adequately elucidate the reasons for Libya's seemingly intractable civil war.

The synthesis of the above literature found in the succeeding portion of this thesis serves to directly address this work's main research question. There exist several factors that hold more significance than others in explaining the intractable nature of Libya's current civil war. Although Libya has been in existence as an independent state since 1951, a sense of national identity encompassing all or even a large portion of the population has

yet to evolve, largely because of a fractured history of tribalism, colonialism, revolutions, and autocratic rule that have left in their wake a country composed of divisive, competitive, and antagonistic factions. These fractures increased with the removal of Gaddafi during the Arab Spring and the subsequent explosion of violence without a viable state response.

Libya represents a dizzying array of armed factions with competing demands, differing levels of control, shifting alliances, and oscillating objectives all bent on achieving their own version of governance. Internal group dynamics coupled with competition for scarce resources of manpower and material make for a dynamic set up for failure from the starting block. Though even if these differences were to be somehow worked out internally, there is little to suggest that groups would simply stop fighting and acquiesce to a leader who does not share their particular vision of the future.

Without external actors, it would be difficult to sustain Libya's level of violence. At the same time, the deep-rooted factionalism and the obvious intractability of the conflict limit the ability of outside forces to bring about a peaceful and enduring resolution to the fighting. After all, it was largely because of foreign intervention that the revolution to overthrow Gaddafi in 2011 was successful. The international community (including regional actors, Western states, and international organizations) has yet failed to bring peace. Therefore, external intervention in Libya's civil war is directly contributing to its continuance and removing any hope of a timely cessation of hostilities. These outside actors appear to be a part of the problem and, because of their differing goals, have almost eliminated any possible solution for peace.

However, it is clear that conditions in Libya up to 2011 have undoubtedly played a role in the subsequent course of events. The state's tumultuous history was unquestionably relevant in setting the conditions necessary for the civil war and its prolongation. Deep-rooted and divisive ethnic, tribal, and religious currents have been present in Libya and continue to be so today, accentuated by external intervention. This thesis argues that the high degree to which outside actors have become involved in the affairs of Libya has done far more harm than good. While the jury may still be out on whether Libya would have been better left to pick up its own pieces following Gaddafi's demise, there is clear

evidence that their doing so would have been much easier with a supportive or altogether nonexistent outside influence.

The combination and net effect of exploring these factors will be to illustrate that, while Libya's conflict shares some commonalities with other civil wars; it is a case unique unto itself. Although it possesses aspects common to other civil wars both past and present, the elements within Libya mixed with the overwhelming international (to include both state and non-state) entities involved have created a virtually insurmountable set of obstacles to peace. It is the sheer multitude of factors, the war's persistence thus far, and the absence of any pending conclusion that make Libya a case very worthy of study.

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I. INTRODUCTION, RELEVANCE, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis explains the factors that contribute to the outbreak and persistence of the current civil war in Libya. It endeavors to place that war in an international context by examining the role of foreign and regional actors. This thesis also explores how U.S. interests are affected by this on-going and seemingly unresolvable crisis in a country that has not typically featured prominently in international affairs, beyond the ability of its former leader Muammar Gaddafi to provoke and agitate world leaders. In other words, it answers: why should the United States, and other international actors care about what happens in Libya? What explains the catalyst for and protraction of this conflict? Also, what is at stake in the Libyan civil war; why is it important to resolve it; and what steps are most likely to do so?

This thesis begins with a brief examination of Libya's geopolitical position in the region as an important north-south axis between the Mediterranean and the African heartland as well as an East-West link between the populous and volatile Middle East and the Maghreb. It then examines the political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to the current crisis, and also explores the efforts of outside powers to intervene, and the consequences of that intervention. Achieving an understanding of the history and context of the Libyan civil war might possibly suggest some avenues and strategies for a resolution. This is accomplished by briefly exploring the significance of Libya's major historical eras; examining the role of Islamist factions; assessing the current state of the myriad local, national, and international factions involved; weighing the impetuses and elements of the war's continuation against the contemporary civil war literature; and detailing specifically the United States' involvement past and present. Finally, this thesis concludes with a set of factors that adequately elucidate the reasons for Libya's seemingly intractable civil war.

B. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The history of Libya contrasts colorful and romantic images of Bedouin in seasonal transhumance with their flocks between a beautiful Mediterranean shoreline and a pristine desert, greedy European imperialists, and sinister local autocrats, presiding of late over war-ravaged towns. While the causes of Libya's current conflict which initiated in 2011 have been analyzed, why the fighting persists, to what degree it continues to scramble Libya's internal power configurations, the role of international involvement, and why for the moment there are no obvious prospects for an end to the bloodletting, remain poorly understood. A review of existing literature on civil wars, rebel groups, and international proxy involvement reveals that Libya is seldom cited as a case study. This thesis traces the origins of the Libyan civil war and explores how the conflict's evolution over the last eight years has changed.

A focus only on the reasons for the conflict's genesis is particularly insufficient in accounting for variations in the civil war since its inception. Like all conflicts, the situation in Libya has considerably evolved since 2011. Those changes, contributions, and reshaping offer valuable, if so far understudied, data points to explain the persistence of its civil war. As such, the core of this research is dedicated to gaining an appreciation for the factors of civil war persistence that have hitherto been understudied in general and particularly in the Libyan context.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that follows is divided into four sections and each ultimately amounts to a corresponding thesis chapter. The first section of literature deals with the historical roots of Libya's current conflict while the second encompasses that which explains the contemporary (2011 to present) actors. The third section details the scholarly work dedicated to examining the outsized influence that Islamist groups have had on Libya both past and present. Finally, and what is of particular significance, is the theoretical work that relates to the causes of civil wars and factors that account for its persistence. This final undertaking is further broken down into two sections to include both internal and external factors.

1. PRE-2011 LIBYAN HISTORY

Regarding Libya's history, John Wright offers perhaps the most encompassing work in his 1982 book titled *Libya, A Modern History*.¹ His exhaustive narrative details the pre-Ottoman empires that comprised what would become Libya, the imperial context and colonial systems imposed by the Ottomans and Italians, the United Nations' failed efforts at state building, and concludes with a look at the first decade of Gaddafi's reign. Wright chronicles the many negative elements of Libya's past—its geography, climate, history of violent conquest, warlordism, and distinct regional identities—that militate against national unity.²

Libyan native Ali Abdullatif Ahmida's 1994 book *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonialization, and Resistance 1830–1932* challenges the standard Eurocentric view of Libyan history. Ahmida opines that the common paradigm is one where “Europe has a history that is dynamic, whereas North Africa has had a passive history” and such a view is unable “to explain social transformation and the nature of politics in today's North Africa.”³ He considers this passive history as one that is only observed in response to an outside force and therefore devoid of any internal agency. Ahmida's local perspective adds balance and nuance to Wright's work, which combines to offer a very clear picture of Libya's heritage of instability and clan, tribal, and family animosities woven into the fabric of a society with a brittle and incomplete sense of national identity.

2. LIBYA: 2011 TO PRESENT

Moving from past to present, there are a number of valuable works devoted to understanding the complicated post-2011 period. Foremost among these sources is Jacob Mundy's book simply titled *Libya* that thoroughly explains how the state moved from the

¹ John Wright, *Libya, A Modern History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

² Wright.

³ Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932*, SUNY Series in the Social and Economic History of the Middle East (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 4.

Gaddafi era to something equally ruinous. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) produced an invaluable report in early 2015 that, in its own words, provides a “detailed examination of the armed conflict in Libya between the Operation Dignity and Libya Dawn military coalitions.”⁴ The combination of these works lay out a clear overview of the situation and proved indispensable in understanding the broad contours of the civil war.

Though to gain a more detailed and granular appreciation for the situation in Libya since 2011, several key articles must be highlighted. The U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute produced a detailed report in 2012 that identified the multitude of challenges to building statehood in Libya following the Arab Spring revolution.⁵ What was perhaps most beneficial in gaining an appreciation for this tumultuous time period was the expert testimony found in three Committee on Foreign Affairs reports.⁶ These documents were both voluminous and detailed in their explanation of the opaque goings-on inside Libya since the fall of Gaddafi.

3. ISLAMIST ACTORS

A third category of literature which deals with the myriad Islamist forces found in Libya will be discussed in Chapter III. The preponderance of data dedicated specifically to Libya is directly relevant to this thesis and timely. The sources used were specifically meant to provide a holistic look at the nature of Islam in Libya from the earliest days of the state’s existence right up to the present. These latter scholarly works represent the most up-

⁴ Nathaniel Barr and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “Dignity and Dawn: Libya’s Escalating Civil War,” *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2015.1.01>.

⁵ Mohammed El-Katiri, *State-Building Challenges in a Post-Revolution Libya* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012).

⁶ *Libya: Five Years After Gaddafi, Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 114th Congress, November 30, 2016, Serial No. 114–238, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2016/11/libya-five-years-after-ghadafi>

The Conflict in Libya, Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 116th Congress, May 15, 2019, Serial No. 116–38, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg36330/pdf/CHRG-116hhrg36330.pdf>.

Libya Fractured: The Struggle for Unity, Hearing Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 115th Congress, April 18, 2018, Serial No. 115–125, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA13/20180418/108183/HHRG-115-FA13-Wstate-FriendA-20180418.pdf>

to-date picture of the groups who seek to implant their version of Islam to a portion or all of Libya.

The natural starting place to understand Islam in Libya, however, is to take a slight departure from the present and look at the role of Islam under Gaddafi. This is specifically what Mohamad El-Khawas studies in his 1984 book, *Gaddafi and Islam in Libya*. He notes that Gaddafi's form of "personal, civil, criminal, and commercial [policies were] in line with the basic tenets of Sharia"⁷ Additionally, focused on this formative period is Yehudit Ronen's 2017 publication "Libya: Teetering Between War and Diplomacy The Islamic State's Role in Libya's Disintegration." Ronen draws a clear line from past to present by noting that the "collective historic memory...echoes strongly in the local and mainly eastern Libyan jihadist narrative."⁸ Alison Pargeter undertakes a study of how the religious geography of Libya has evolved in the current conflict in her 2009 article: "Localism and Radicalization in North Africa." Her data reinforces the other two works and confirms a link from the Gaddafi era to the present.⁹ Islam's influence, however, did not end with the demise of Gaddafi.

The introduction of outside Islamist influences mixed with a populace ripe for change added to the complexity and intractability of the civil war seen today. Without dredging data for each and every Islamist group in Libya, Chapter III instead focuses its attention on the most prominent. Of these groups in this category are the self-styled Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda (or, more specifically Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)), and Ansar al Sharia. These groups represent the largest investment in the civil war and their outsized influence is certainly worth understanding in the Libyan context.

⁷ Mohamed A. El-Khawas, "Qaddafi and Islam in Libya," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*; Plainfield, Ind. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 64.

⁸ Yehudit Ronen, "Libya: Teetering Between War and Diplomacy The Islamic State's Role in Libya's Disintegration," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2017.1275518>.

⁹ Alison Pargeter, "Localism and Radicalization in North Africa: Local Factors and the Development of Political Islam in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 85, no. 5 (2009): 1031–44.

Literature regarding IS' involvement in Libya is ubiquitous given their spread across the globe. It includes studies such as Christopher S. Chivvis's 2016 piece titled: "Countering the Islamic State in Libya,"¹⁰ a 2017 article published in *the Economist* titled: "Down but not out; Islamic State in Libya,"¹¹ and a 2015 piece appearing in *Ya Libnan* titled: "ISIS Presents Main Threat in Libya's Civil War."¹² In addition to these articles specifically dealing with the Islamic State, numerous other publications explore the Islamist factions more broadly that also include data on IS.

Information on Al-Qaeda's branch operating in North Africa can be found in Thomas Joscelyn's 2017 work titled: "Jihadist Groups Operating Inside Libya"¹³ as well as Arturo Varvelli's "The Libyan Jihadist Outlook: Origins, Evolutions and Future Scenarios"¹⁴ published in 2019. Ansar al-Sharia is sufficiently covered in Aaron Y. Zelin's aptly named: "The Rise and Decline of Ansar al-Sharia in Libya."¹⁵ The insights these authors offer regarding the three main Islamist factions operating within Libyan territory are vital in understanding the nature of the current conflict. Equally important, however, is setting the ideological dimensions of the Libyan case among civil wars in general.

4. CIVIL WARS

The literature regarding civil wars will be divided into three broad categories: general civil war studies; those focused on internal issues; and finally, the works that center on external factors. It is worth noting that only a portion of this literature deals directly

¹⁰ Christopher S. Chivvis, "Countering the Islamic State in Libya," *Survival* 58, no. 4 (July 3, 2016): 113–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1207954>.

¹¹ Salman, Abedi, "Down But Not Out; Islamic State in Libya," *The Economist* 423, no. 9042 (May 27, 2017).

¹² *Ya Libnan*, "ISIS Presents Main Threat in Libya's Civil War." June 6, 2015. <https://yalibnan.com/2015/06/06/isis-presents-main-threat-in-libyas-civil-war/>.

¹³ Thomas Joscelyn, "Jihadist Groups Operating Inside Libya," *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly*; Portsmouth, February 19, 2017.

¹⁴ Serafettin Pektas and Johan Leman, *Militant Jihadism: Today and Tomorrow* (Leuven University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvq2vzmt>.

¹⁵ Aaron Zelin, "The Rise and Decline of Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 18 (May 1, 2015): 104,118,120.

with Libya. Sources focusing on a general overview and those that center on other comparable states were also considered, helping to answer the research question outlined above.

The most appropriate and effective place to gain an overall understanding of civil wars is a look at a collection of the most prominent works dedicated to the subject encased in T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell's *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?*¹⁶ In it, scholars are grouped into three broad categories to include the factors that bring about civil wars, those who clarify factors that end civil wars, and finally efforts to elucidate emerging trends in the study of civil wars.¹⁷

D. INTERNAL FACTORS

The endogenous aspects of the Libyan civil war are a natural starting point to understand why the conflict began as well as to why it continues. Andrea Carboni and James Moody look specifically at the varying factions in Libya in their 2018 work titled: "Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War." They focus not at national-level institutions, but rather at local and regional actors, that, since 2014, have created a "distinct subnational political order ...in which actors engage in state-making practices driven by local interests."¹⁸ Their work centers on Libya as an aggregate of local interests rather than as a traditional state structure with a functioning central government. Carboni and Moody conclude that "conflict patterns, (in)stability and the prevailing political order are therefore conditional on the nature of the dominant actor, their strategies and modes of violence within their areas of influence."¹⁹

¹⁶ T. David Mason and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, eds., *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

¹⁷ Mason and Mitchell.

¹⁸ Andrea Carboni and James Moody, "Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 29, no. 3 (May 4, 2018): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2018.1455318>.

¹⁹ Carboni and Moody, 456.

Though this was the only prominent study conducted on Libya, other theories of internal factors at play in civil conflict could prove to be equally helpful. For instance, in 2012, Fotini Christia set out to understand the internal dynamics of group formation and disintegration in *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars*. She claims that “alliance formation is tactical, motivated by a concern with victory and the maximization of wartime returns as anticipated in the political power sharing of the post-conflict state.”²⁰ Christia goes on to argue that the notion of tribal, religious, ideological, or ethnic identity-based differences do little to explain the formation of alliances, but instead shows, “that the relative power distribution between and within the various warring groups in a given conflict is the primary driving force behind alliance formation, alliance changes, as well as group splits and takeovers.”²¹

Libya’s sub-state actors include various terrorist organizations with international affiliations that add to the complexity of the situation. Shifting tack slightly from the more or less formal state-centric analysis, Assaf Moghadam looks at terrorist organizations’ influences in his 2017 book: *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors*.²² The link between global jihad and civil unrest is clear in his assertion that “today’s enabling environment also features numerous insurgencies and civil wars in places such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, which offer insurgent and terrorist actors ample opportunities to join forces.”²³ Moghadam seeks to identify the way that terrorist organizations “network” to accomplish their goals in the permissive environment created by civil conflict. He concludes that “contemporary terrorist cooperation combines established forms of organizational cooperation with...networked cooperation [where there is] at least one informal terrorist actor—that is, an informal network or a terrorist

²⁰ Fotini Christia, *Alliance Formation in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

²¹ Christia, 4.

²² Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors*, Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

²³ Moghadam, 3.

entrepreneur.”²⁴ This reinforces Christia’s assertion that ideology plays a much smaller role in alliance formation than originally assumed.

Peter Krause also focuses on internal groups and their struggle for power in his 2017 book, *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win*.²⁵ Through his analysis of four separate groups to include Palestinians, Israelis, Algerians, and the Irish in their efforts to achieve success in national movements, he identifies numerous dynamics at work. The overriding determination is that the interaction within these movements is a much better determinant of success than the interaction between these groups and others. He argues that “in fact, the internal balance of power is the most significant variable driving group behavior and movement outcomes.”²⁶ His analysis sheds light on the potential for success, as well as the extreme difficulties, of groups competing for control of Libya.

The consensus of the literature focused on internal dynamics indicates that accumulation and maintenance of power arrangements are at the forefront of group formation. All authors cited downplay identity-based factors and highlight the emphasis that groups place on the accumulation of power to advance their goals—whatever they may be. Though these works definitely contribute to the understanding of Libya’s situation, an appreciation must be had for the multitude of external actors present in Libya to grasp the conflict in its entirety.

E. EXTERNAL FACTORS

The intervention of many international organizations to include the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), state sponsors, terrorist organizations, and non-state entities help to explain why the Libyan civil war has continued. In their 2013 work, “The Rebel Alliance, Why Syria’s Armed Opposition Has Failed to Unify,” Afshon Ostovar and Will McCants discovered that “the presence of multiple groups with low levels

²⁴ Moghadam, 4.

²⁵ Peter Krause, *Rebel Power: Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017).

²⁶ Krause, 17.

of cooperation and independent access to external support could lengthen the duration of the Syrian conflict.”²⁷ They go on to conclude that “the presence of greater resources could also create more competition between rebel groups, especially between those with divergent goals and asymmetric resources levels.”²⁸ Ostovar and McCants also focus on internal group dynamics throughout their research. For the purposes of this thesis, however, their work on external actors and the ability for these forces to prolong and intensify civil conflict is particularly beneficial as they pertain to Libya.

Also emphasizing the large role transnational actors play—though in this case focusing specifically on neighboring countries—is Idean Salehyan’s 2009 book: *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics*.²⁹ He shows how rebel groups seek assistance from nearby countries and how these external actors use rebel groups to advance their interests. Salehyan claims that “there is frequently nothing ‘domestic’ about a civil war, and conflicts within countries often give rise to tensions between them.”³⁰ Though there are potential gains for the rebels as well as their international backers, the net effect is to “significantly raise the costs of counterinsurgency while reducing its effectiveness,”³¹ and prolong the conflict. Certainly Egypt’s involvement in the current conflict could be explained by this concept.

In the Mason and McLaughlin piece mentioned earlier, perhaps the most germane Chapter to this thesis is that of Christopher Linebarger and Andrew Enterline titled, “Third Party Intervention and the Duration and Outcome of Civil Wars.” Their work engages three questions: “(1) What are the forms of third-party intervention? (2) What factors make nations more or less likely to intervene in a given civil war? [and] (3) How does third party

²⁷ Afshon Ostovar and Will McCants, “The Rebel Alliance: Why Syria’s Armed Opposition Has Failed to Unify” (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, March 1, 2013), 2, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA582040>.

²⁸ Ostovar and McCants, 2.

²⁹ Idean Salehyan, *Rebels Without Borders: Transnational Insurgencies in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3137941>.

³⁰ Salehyan, 4.

³¹ Salehyan, 6.

intervention affect the duration and outcome of such conflicts?”³² In it, they interestingly note that the longer a conflict continues, they argue, the more likely it is to end not in military victory, but in a negotiated settlement.³³ Their efforts are directly relevant to the situation in Libya and undoubtedly assist in understanding the (negative) impact of outside entities.

David E. Cunningham also focuses on external factors, but instead of adopting the often assumed reason for intervention as shoring up one party or the other with the hopes of winning, he contends that “external states become involved in civil war to pursue an agenda which is separate from the goals of the internal combatants.”³⁴ In his 2010 work “Blocking Resolution: How External States can Prolong Civil Wars,” Cunningham notes that external actors make the cessation of hostilities more difficult by two factors. The simple addition of one entity that must be satisfied by the peace arrangement as well as that external group having less to gain compared to their indigenous patrons can significantly muddle the war’s finale. He claims that “when states intervene with an independent agenda, they make wars substantially longer.”³⁵

While still related to the effect external actors can achieve in the duration and conclusion of civil wars, “Diplomatic Interventions and Civil War: A New Dataset” narrows its scope to assess the impact of diplomatic efforts. The authors look at a “dataset on 438 diplomatic interventions in 68 conflicts stretching from 1945 to 1999” and conclude that diplomatic efforts by external actors can actually help the peace process and facilitate the “termination of civil wars.”³⁶ Two of the three authors (Aydin and Regan) would add to this body of work a few years later.

³² Mason and Mitchell, *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?*, 93.

³³ Mason and Mitchell, 93.

³⁴ David E. Cunningham, “Blocking Resolution: How External States Can Prolong Civil Wars,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 2 (March 2010): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309353488>.

³⁵ Cunningham, 115.

³⁶ Patrick M. Regan, Richard W. Frank, and Aysegul Aydin, “Diplomatic Interventions and Civil War: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 1 (January 2009): 135, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343308098408>.

In a 2012 work, “Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration,” the authors explore the impact of unilateral actors in civil war to conclude that “unilateral interventions exert a cumulative impact on civil wars depending on interveners’ interrelations.”³⁷ Specifically, they note that “interveners supporting opposing sides of the war increase war duration” and, conversely that “third-party states bandwagoning on the same side of a civil war are effective in stopping the fighting only when the intervening parties share similar preferences.”³⁸ An important distinction that merits scrutiny is that third party involvement does not necessarily equate to boots on the ground and can therefore take on a unique form of intervention.

Proxy warfare has been an aspect of conflicts dating back decades. The seemingly low cost and low attribution elements make it an enticing option for states with an interest in achieving a desired outcome without the concomitant desire to use their own troops to achieve it. Though the results on the ground can be significantly less than rosy. On this subject, Andrew Mumford’s 2013 work titled: “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict” shows that “although proxy wars circumvent the potential international political uproar provoked by direct intervention, especially where the legitimacy of such action is under question, they also increase the likelihood of higher casualties as a result of the influx of externally sourced weapons, money or personnel.”³⁹ His study is not the only one to recognize the significance of this arrangement.

Adding an element of nuance, depth, and specificity to the subject of proxy warfare is the same author’s 2013 book, *Proxy Warfare*.⁴⁰ Mumford helpfully notes that “proxy war is not a form of conflict conducted solely by states. It is very important to address the issue of what proxy warfare means in the age of non-state actors and networked

³⁷ Regan, Frank, and Aydin, 135.

³⁸ Aysegul Aydin and Patrick M. Regan, “Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration,” *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 3 (September 2012): 573, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066111403515>.

³⁹ Andrew Mumford, “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict,” *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 2 (April 2013): 45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787733>.

⁴⁰ Mumford, *Proxy Warfare* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

terrorism.”⁴¹ The phenomenon of proxy warfare carried out by states and non-states alike is certainly playing out in Libya and must be understood as a very important aspect of the current civil war. The above literature undoubtedly sheds light on the overall nature of civil wars as well as the specific contributions made by both internal and external forces. Finally, there exists one source of data on factors specific to Libya.

Jacob Mundy claims that “it was undoubtedly the entry of NATO and the Arab League into the [Libyan] conflict in mid-March [of 2011] that had the greatest effect on the course of the civil war.”⁴² Mundy argues that outside actors tend to prolong civil wars rather than resolve them because international involvement allowed rebel groups to regroup, derailed peace negotiations, and created deep and long-lasting bonds between the rebel groups and their international supporters.⁴³ The understanding of this relationship between internal and external group interaction will be of paramount importance in answering the stated research question.

F. EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The synthesis of the above literature found in the succeeding chapters of this thesis serves to directly address this work’s main research question. After a review of the above-mentioned literature, there exist several factors that hold more significance than others in explaining the intractable nature of Libya’s current civil war. Although Libya has been in existence as an independent state since 1951, a sense of national identity encompassing all or even a large portion of the population has yet to evolve, largely because of a fractured Libyan history of tribalism, colonialism, revolutions, and autocratic rule that have left in their wake a country composed of divisive, competitive, and antagonistic factions. These fractures increased with the removal of Gaddafi during the Arab Spring and the subsequent explosion of violence without a viable state response.

⁴¹ Mumford, 8.

⁴² Jacob Mundy, *Libya, Hot Spots in Global Politics* (Cambridge, UK); Medford, MA: Polity, 2018), 12.

⁴³ Mundy, 12.

Libya represents a dizzying array of armed factions with competing demands, differing levels of control, shifting alliances, and oscillating objectives all bent on achieving their own version of governance. Internal group dynamics coupled with competition for scarce resources of manpower and material make for a dynamic set up for failure from the starting block. Though even if these differences were to be somehow worked out internally, there is little to suggest that groups would simply stop fighting and acquiesce to a leader who does not share their vision of the future.

Without outside actors, it would be difficult to sustain Libya's level of violence. At the same time, the deep-rooted factionalism, and the obvious intractability of the conflict limits the ability of external forces to bring about a peaceful and enduring resolution to the fighting. After all, it was largely because of outside intervention that the revolution to overthrow Gaddafi in 2011 was successful. The international community (including regional actors, Western states, and international organizations) has yet failed to bring peace. It is evident that outside intervention in Libya's civil war is directly contributing to its continuance and removing any hope of a timely cessation to hostilities. These external actors appear to be a part of the problem and, because of their differing goals, have almost entirely eliminated any possible solution for peace.

Throughout the following Chapters, however, it is clear that conditions in Libya up to 2011 undoubtedly played a role in the subsequent course of events. The state's tumultuous history was unquestionably relevant in setting the conditions necessary for the civil war and its prolongation. Deep-rooted and divisive ethnic, tribal, and religious currents have been present in Libya and continue to be so today, accentuated by the outside intervention. This thesis argues that the high degree to which outside actors have become involved in the affairs of Libya has done far more harm than good. While the jury may still be out on whether Libya would have been better left to pick up its own pieces following Gaddafi's demise, there is clear evidence that their doing so would have been much easier with a supportive or altogether nonexistent outside influence.

The combination and net effect of exploring these factors is to illustrate that, while Libya shares some commonalities with other civil wars, nevertheless, it is a case unique onto itself. Although it possesses aspects common to other civil wars both past and present,

the elements within Libya mixed with the overwhelming international (to include both state and non-state) entities involved have created a virtually insurmountable set of obstacles to peace. It is the sheer multitude of factors that make Libya a case very worthy of study and equally interesting. The following section details how the remainder of the thesis is arranged to best explain why Libya's civil war appears to be interminable.

G. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis question, hypothesis, and research design followed by a characterization of Libya's importance to the various states and organizations involved in its civil war. The second chapter consists of a brief history of the country to include its colonial past, post-WWII era, Gaddafi years, and a focus on those aspects that are most germane to the stated research question. Chapter III consists of a more detailed examination of the Islamist forces at work inside and outside of Libya due to their predominance on the scene. Chapter IV looks from 2011 to the present with an emphasis on the specific events which have impacted the current conflict. The chapter also identifies and examines the role played by external actors (excluding the Islamist entities covered in Chapter III). This includes the United States, the UN, NATO, the European Union, Russia, Turkey, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and any other prominent party contributing to the war effort. The fifth chapter explores the factors present in general civil wars and those exhibited specifically in Libya's case. As Chapters IV and V are a significant portion of the thesis and directly relate to the hypotheses mentioned earlier in this proposal, they serve as the core of the thesis and require the most attention and scrutiny. The sixth and final chapter concludes with a synopsis of the findings, highlighting the most salient explanations for the seemingly endless civil war Libyans find themselves mired in. Following this, the chapter provides an estimation of the importance of Libya to American and other interested governments, and concludes by emphasizing any useful policy recommendations.

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II. A BRIEF LIBYAN HISTORY TO 2011

A. INTRODUCTION

The history of Libya up to 2011 offers a saga of triumph and tragedy, isolation and intervention, as well as chaos and relative stability. Its people throughout this time have witnessed successive attempts at governance by external as well as home grown forces. Libyan history shares characteristics with other African states as well as exhibiting facets seen in Arab polities that share the deeply-rooted centrality that Islam occupies in the everyday lives of Libyans. Though certainly interesting and unquestionably worthy of study, the history in and of itself is of less importance to this work than the requirement to identify what factors endemic to Libya's history that are most responsible for the war's genesis, and more specifically, for its protraction.

This chapter advances four characteristics that are directly relevant and indeed instrumental in the shaping of the current conflict. First, Libya is geographically broken into three distinct, historically autonomous areas that were only amalgamated into a single entity by outsiders in the twentieth century. These separate areas were comprised of tribal and ethnic differences as well as economic alignments that existed for generations. Second, the Ottoman and Italian interventions and interaction with the West generally, caused the new state to adopt a number of modernizing principles, aspirations, and institutions fundamentally at odds with the region's social environment, political structure, and Islamic culture. Third, Muammar Gaddafi and his authoritarian reign unquestionably shaped the course of Libya's political and economic development throughout the four decades of his ascendancy. Finally, the so-called resource curse of vast oil deposits drive competition and fund the faction(s) who battle to control its riches. As mentioned earlier, these qualities are not unique to Libya. What is sadly significant, however, is how many of the characteristics typically associated with conflict Libya possessed and how those unreconciled issues have shaped the current civil war.

As discussed in the first chapter, Gaddafi's misrule profoundly impacted and continues to influence Libya's trajectory. His authoritarian regime pervaded Libya's social,

political, economic, as well as religious spheres. Gaddafi and his unique relationship with Islam will be discussed in Chapter III while his political, social, and economic impacts are illuminated in this chapter. In the meantime, by using sources written before 2011 to avoid any potential predictive biases, this chapter identifies the underlying factors in Libya's long and turbulent history that set the conditions for the current, seemingly intractable civil war.

B. ONE STATE FROM THREE

Cultural and political geography must count as Libya's most fundamental and perhaps most insurmountable obstacle to unity. The fact that the state is an aggregation of what had long been three separate and autonomous regions has left a heritage of profound regionalism—represented by Tripolitania in the west, Cyrenaica in the east, and finally Fezzan in the south. Historically, these regions consisted of not only “armed tribal confederations,” but actual “regional states such as the Awlad Muhammad in Fezzan (1550–812) and the Sanusi state in Cyrenaica (1870–1911).”⁴⁴ No surprise then that a current map of territorial control of the competing factions largely mirrors this historic political and cultural geography.

Therefore, rather than borders arbitrarily placed on a map, each region existed informally and in fact as its own entity, each with ties to neighboring tribes and eventually states. Tribes in Tripolitania had strong ties to those in southern Tunisia as well as the larger Muslim world to its south and west. Tribes in Fezzan were tied to the Lake Chad basin area, and Cyrenaican tribes mostly interacted with Egypt.⁴⁵ Therefore, while the West viewed the Sahara as a barrier, for its inhabitants it was a living region, a corridor of commerce and cultural exchange across which strong socio-economic bonds developed over the course of history that rendered any border imposed by outsiders a simple act of cartography to be ignored in reality. This situation would prevail until outside powers began to exert their influence on these regions. And even then, it should be remembered that despite great efforts, outside powers did not nor could they significantly alter the

⁴⁴ Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 12.

⁴⁵ Ahmida, 12.

fractionalized nature of the area. Nonetheless, external intervention undoubtedly shaped Libya in fundamental ways.

C. FOREIGN INTERVENTION

The first external actor in the modern era to make a genuine effort at state building came in the mid-nineteenth century with the Ottoman Turks. Initially, the Ottoman Empire's idea of governance in the region would only reinforce the fractionalized nature of what had long been the status quo. Indeed, Ahmida states that "nineteenth-century Ottoman state formation was characterized by a weak central state and the power of the tribes."⁴⁶ Turkish leaders were content to receive taxes in exchange for a nominal form of rule that required little manpower to maintain. Wright argues that Ottoman "indirect rule" through a "Bey" or local governor was "not needlessly harsh or overbearing; if it gave little to the country, it demanded little in return."⁴⁷

However, this system of relative autonomy would not last as European powers began to expand their colonial reach into the Mediterranean, forcing the Turks to follow suit. Wright goes on to note that the Ottomans "occupied Tripoli in 1835 largely to forestall further French expansion in North Africa" as well as a concern over "Egypt's achievement of near-independence."⁴⁸ Although at its outset less invasive than other forms of indirect rule witnessed elsewhere, the Ottoman occupation of Tripoli marked a turning point in the history of what would become "Libya," for Tripoli would become the launch pad for "the first of three foreign campaigns of conquest—two of them lasting over twenty years each—that Libya was to endure in the course of the following 100 years."⁴⁹

Rule by the European counterparts of the Ottomans would be far less nominal and indirect for at least three reasons: first, the European countries, even newly unified Italy, were far more modern, bureaucratized, and militarized states than was the ramshackle rule

⁴⁶ Ahmida, 11.

⁴⁷ Wright, *Libya, A Modern History*, 20.

⁴⁸ Wright, 11.

⁴⁹ Wright, 11.

of Constantinople's Sublime Porte. Second, by the mid-nineteenth century if not before, empire became both a status symbol and a search for economic self-sufficiency among many of those European countries blessed with a maritime frontier. Finally, as a practical matter, European governments needed to regulate a contagion of often privately financed European military explorers rushing around Africa and elsewhere to stake claims of colonial sovereignty. For this reason, the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, sometimes known as the Congo Conference, established the principle of “effective occupation” as the basis for recognizing colonial claims among the competing powers. Henceforth, no country could stake a claim to a piece of non-European territory unless they could put boots on the ground.

Hardly had it been unified in 1871, that Italy became the first Western power to take an interest in the area and looked to control Libya for a number of reasons. These impulses were led by the fact that as a new nation, Italy sought the status of a civilizing colonizer equivalent to that of more established European powers. However, most of Italy's motivation to colonize was spurred by internal, rather than international issues, although the two often overlapped. An overriding concern that Italy shared with other late modernizing, under-industrialized nations with limited agricultural space like Japan, was that the country overpopulated. Theory at the time held overpopulation to be dangerous because it would lead to social turmoil, even revolution.

Hence, Ahmida argues, a need for Italy's ruling class to offer land and voting rights to peasants, “eas [ed] social tensions inside Italy and [put] an end to the revolutionary dreams of Italian nationalists.”⁵⁰ But one way for conservative rulers to avoid a redistribution of political power was to encourage emigration. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many Italians were emigrating to northern Europe, the United States, and Argentina. However, emigration had the downside in an era when conscription underpinned and sustained large armies required for homeland defense, that these emigrants were lost to the nation. Furthermore, Italian immigrants faced humiliating discrimination in places like the United States and France. Therefore, the best outcome was

⁵⁰ Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 105.

to create “colonies of settlement,” places where the authority of the homeland held sway, a loyal population could still be rallied for imperial defense in an international crisis while at the same time providing a safety valve for the perceived problem of overpopulation at home. The British empire had been most successful in this endeavor with the settlement of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa. After the loss of Quebec, Algeria had embodied that hope for France, although French North Africa remained underdeveloped and underpopulated, while nevertheless subsisting as a highly militarized frontier.

Coming late into the imperial game, locked inside the Mediterranean, without a strong navy to search for territory further afield, reluctant to engage in an imperial competition with much stronger countries like Great Britain, Germany and France, Rome’s colonizing options were limited almost exclusively to the Mediterranean littoral and challenging the decrepit Ottoman Empire. In this, they were aided by the fact that historically, groups of Italian émigrés had created settlements in North Africa, most notably around Trieste, Tripoli, Tunis, and the Constantine province of eastern Algeria, but also in Egypt. This gave rise to a nationalist mythology of an “unredeemed Italy” beyond the confines of the Italian boot, and allowed Rome the pretext to intervene to protect their nationals. An imaginative manipulation of Italian nationalist mythology also allowed the more indoctrinated to argue that, as the modern heir of the classical Empire, Rome could lay sovereign claim to vestiges of its former realm.⁵¹

Unfortunately for them, Rome’s imperial ambitions far surpassed its ability to realize them. The Italian invasion of 1911 kicked off a campaign of resistance led by the legendary Omar al-Mukhtar, “the Lion of the Desert,” which lasted twenty-one years. The proclaimed heirs of the Roman Empire made a bad situation worse when fascists led by Benito Mussolini took control of the Italian government in 1922. The ascension of a totalitarian ideology and a regime which viewed violence unrestrained by law or ethics as both redemptive and a positive good, led to a policy of forced subjugation of Libyans. This colonial mismanagement was felt most painfully by the everyday Libyan. It was said that, while “the Italians imprinted Libya with asphalt highways and buildings, ... they did little

⁵¹ Ahmida, 104.

for the Libyans themselves” by barring them from education and government, and “subvert [ing] the economy of pastoralism.”⁵²

The end result was that the violence of the Italian conquest both disaggregated and brutalized Libyan society. At the same time, it left a memory of heroic resistance to Western ideas under a charismatic, traditionalist Islamic leader. This shared memory of successful resistance to the West becomes another factor that prolongs conflict in Libya, militates against modernization, reinforces the Islamist message, and established the precedent of a charismatic leader. In this way, the colonial period had introduced the contradictory precedents of resistance, combined with brutality, authoritarianism, and repression as a system of government. Libya would get their charismatic leader soon enough.

D. ENTER GADDAFI

The reign of Muammar Gaddafi stands as the third facet in Libya’s history with direct linkages to the current civil war. In 1969, Gaddafi originally set out to create a “state of the masses” or as he called it *Jamahiriya*—a blend of Islamic tenets, popular will, modernization, and economic restructuring to force the country out of its post-colonial and post-monarchical backwardness. Gaddafi’s vision was laid out in something entitled *The Green Book*. Frederic Wehrey claims that it is “breathtaking in scope and incoherence” and that the book “was a farrago of socialism, democracy, and capitalism” that “resulted in the deinstitutionalization of Libya and the dismantling of the professional bureaucracy.”⁵³ Though seemingly well-intentioned (if strangely concocted) at the outset, Gaddafi’s plan for his popular revolution would soon fall apart and remove almost all vestiges of the peoples’ power and replace it with the power of one man.

John Wright’s account of this period in Libyan history asserts that by 1975 the Gaddafi regime was consolidating its grip on the country and subsequently “faced serious

⁵² Frederic M. Wehrey, *The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya*, First edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 11.

⁵³ Wehrey, 12–13.

internal unrest.”⁵⁴ This stemmed directly from Gaddafi’s own words when he “led a broad attack on all political opposition, and from 1975 onward tended to entrust his personal security and certain aspects of state security to his own family and tribe.”⁵⁵ The unrest that followed initially began as university students in Benghazi and Tripoli—who saw “Gaddafi’s ideas as tedious and embarrassingly naïve”—clashed with police resulting at least ten deaths.⁵⁶ This initial unrest was only the first of many clashes between the people and their increasingly more oppressive and visibly more aggressive leader.

Indeed, by 1980 organizations of Libyans located outside its borders were accusing the Gaddafi regime of “intellectual terrorism” and were correspondingly ordered “home immediately to be liquidated” by the regime.⁵⁷ The Libyan diaspora was not the only organization to note Gaddafi’s increasingly contested injustices. Also in 1980, the human rights group Amnesty International “expressed concern at what they termed ‘an alarming change in the pattern of human rights violations in Libya.’”⁵⁸ This pattern would continue and intensify in the decades that followed. What is important to understanding this era is that the *Jamahiriyah* “mainly functioned to divide the polity internally even more than it already was,” and to force Libyans to turn “to their immediate social environment to survive.”⁵⁹ In addition to holding sway over the Libyan population in the social and political spheres, Gaddafi had an unshakable grasp on the economy as well.

E. THE RESOURCE CURSE

A fourth consideration, and one that is certainly connected to Gaddafi’s influence, is the effect that oil has had on the current Libyan environment. The revenues reaped from hydrocarbons undoubtedly fueled Gaddafi’s ability to embark on an international road

⁵⁴ Wright, *Libya, A Modern History*, 186.

⁵⁵ Wright, 187.

⁵⁶ Wright, 188.

⁵⁷ Wright, 188.

⁵⁸ Wright, 277.

⁵⁹ Mundy, *Libya*, 31.

show espousing the merits of pan-Africanism, pan-Arabism, anti-Zionism, anti-Westernism, and Islamic-centric ideologies to name but a few. Additionally, however, the large deposits of oil under the Libyan soil would have profound effects for the social and political lives of those who walked upon it. Mundy states that “the Gaddafi regime’s attempt to impose such a fanciful, thoroughgoing reorganization of political life in Libya was made possible by the stupendous windfall of revenues the state earned from oil in the 1970s.”⁶⁰ The disastrous domestic policies of Gaddafi’s regime would likely have failed were it not for the very high oil prices of the 1970s.

Historian Dirk Vandewalle notes that “the two central features in the development of Libya after its independence in 1951 have been oil, and the revenues its sales generated.”⁶¹ He asserts that the money freed “the Qadhafi regime from many of the burdens other countries faced during their state-building history – burdens that, in all countries, shape the political, economic, and social relationships between rulers and ruled.”⁶² The consequences of oil wealth also negatively affected Libya’s leaders in general—and Gaddafi in particular—in that it allowed them to “face few burdens of taxation or accountability that can limit their actions,” so that they had the “luxury to construct the contours of their political community without undue political or economic constraints.”⁶³

F. CONCLUSION

The nature of Libya’s fractured past has a direct and observable impact on the way in which groups operate in that country today. Similarly important was how Gaddafi embraced or rejected different groups and factions and their subsequent reaction. These relationships became manifest with the injection of Islamist forces in Libya post-2011. A state cobbled together from three separate areas is already disadvantaged, a situation made

⁶⁰ Mundy, 31–32.

⁶¹ Dirk J. Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 2nd ed (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

⁶² Vandewalle, 2.

⁶³ Vandewalle, 2.

far worse by Gaddafi's tactics. Those vulnerabilities would be further exploited by global and regional Islamist factions.

An additional aspect of Libya's past that has a profound impact on the current civil war was its (largely negative) interaction with outsiders. Be they European or Ottoman, the end result was that the Libyan peoples became the losers. Libya has not fared well with outside intervention. Therefore, from a Libyan perspective, outside intervention has brought only baleful results and has created an aversion to exogenous entities whether they be states, multi-national bodies, or even fellow Muslim-majority factions. The reality is that all are to be distrusted because they arrive with their own set of initiatives and aspirations. Reactions in the present, therefore, are shaped by memories of the past.

Finally, there is oil, the factor that was undoubtedly Gaddafi's ticket to the world stage, beyond of course his charisma or the brilliance of *The Green Book*. It allowed Gaddafi to sponsor everything from terror plots to armed intervention in neighboring countries. However, oil undoubtedly financed much of what infrastructure can be seen in Libya today. But oil cuts both ways, especially when local actors and opponents continually fight for control of its profits. Natural resources have been credited for ruining democracies elsewhere in the world, and Libya is no exception.

The cumulative effects of imperial conquest, colonial rule, tribal factionalism, social and economic disaggregation and mal-governance have been an overwhelming detriment to Libya and its region. That said, while countless other states have had similar histories—several have been endowed with the blessings and curses associated with oil rents, many have been led by ruthless dictators, existed as former colonies, and were subjected to the nearly insurmountable difficulties of melding ethnic, tribal, and religious differences into a singular polity—perhaps none have acquired such a negative inheritance as has Libya.

Since 2011 it has been mired an intractable civil war with severe internal cleavages exacerbated by outside influences with no foreseeable end in sight. The following chapter will explore the environment since the demise of Muammar Gaddafi. It will show how this watershed moment has allowed states and non-state actors alike to gorge on the carcass of

a broken country, making an already explosive situation even more intractable and dangerous.

III. ISLAMIST FORCES AND FACTIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

In addition to the aspects introduced in the previous chapter, a host of Islamist factions found within Libya's borders also significantly affect the state. Islam has been a central factor in Libyan affairs for over a millennium. Beginning with early Muslim adherents arriving from the Arabian Peninsula to the Sanusi Order in the mid-nineteenth century, throughout the Ottoman times and central to Ghaddafi's ruling philosophy, Islamic tenets have shaped, influenced, divided, united, and otherwise affected the people of Libya for generations. This has made Islam a perennial aspect in the political ideology of Libya. Times of tribal pre-statehood, colonialism, and brutal dictatorship have done little to alter the significance of religious ideas and practices in its society.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Islam has remained relevant in the current civil war and, for certain militant groups, taken on a more divisive and radical character. Evidence of this alteration can be found in the number, strength, and tactics of the many Islamist groups currently operating in Libya who claim to be waging their wars in the name of Islam. But just how prominent are Islamists in shaping the current civil war? Was Islamism in Libya in the post-Gaddafi era an important influence for internal and external groups involved in the current (2011 to present) conflict? And if it did play a role, did Islamism serve to better the situation or was its presence detrimental to the cessation of hostilities?

This chapter seeks to understand the role and degree of influence that Islamism has played in the post-Gaddafi era of Libya. This is accomplished broadly by first examining the role that Islam had on Gaddafi himself as this will serve as an important backdrop to the events that would unfold after his removal. This analysis is brief and serves to only set the stage for the 2011 uprising and its eventual evolution into the current civil war. The next section introduces the many factions with Islamist leanings involved in the ongoing civil war. These groups are then placed in their respective geopolitical camps to better understand where they operate, what they espouse, and what they hope to accomplish.

Ostensibly, Libya's internal politics can be divided into two main blocs—the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) seated in Tripoli and the House of Representatives (HoR) government body headquartered in Tobruk. In reality, however, under these two umbrella groups are a prolific amount of other, disparate groups to include those separated by ethnic, tribal, geographical, religious, or some other distinguishing difference. Rounding out this list of internal groups and perhaps most important among them are the organizations centered around Salafi-Jihad, to include the Islamic State (IS), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Sharia, and a host of others.

The third section assesses the impact of Islamism on the strategies and policies of external actors involved in the civil war to include the Gulf States, the European Union (EU), Turkey, Russia, and the United States. Finally, this chapter explores and evaluates the contribution of these groups on the trajectory of Libya's civil war by tracing the involvement of each in a range of tactics from taking lives and territory, to shaping public opinion, as well as the role each has played in infiltrating Libya's underdeveloped political institutions. This chapter concludes with an overall assessment of the role Islamist factions have had on the war and make policy recommendations.

The current literature on the Libyan civil war is focused primarily on the political goals of the aforementioned factions, the ethnic and tribal tensions, and the overarching economic dynamics that are contributing factors, while underestimating the role of religious and ideological differences. Additionally, the literature concerning neighboring and international actors' aspirations is largely focused on regional security, migration, human rights, and economic consequences. This body of work similarly highlights these considerations at the cost of understanding the importance of Islamism and the global efforts to thwart it. This chapter will complement the existent literature and attempt to offer a more accurate and holistic analysis of the myriad challenges facing the groups both inside as well as beyond Libya's borders.

An appropriate place to begin is to identify and examine the many Islamist-leaning factions involved in recent Libyan history, beginning with those spawned in the Gaddafi era. This will include both pro- and anti-Gaddafi entities. Following this look at indigenous forces, the focus will shift to regional actors and their various clients. Finally, this section

will conclude with a look at the proliferation of Islamism via international sponsors. Neighboring Egypt and Tunisia as well as the Gulf States (especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia) have all contributed heavily to various Islamist causes operating inside Libya. Also, transregional groups have catapulted themselves to the fore, capturing headlines as well as recruits from the world over.

B. GADDAFI'S ISLAM

Gaddafi was no stranger to Islam-centric policies. He brought all laws—“personal, civil, criminal, and commercial—in line with the basic tenets of Sharia”⁶⁴ What is exceptional about Gaddafi is not that he had deep feelings about Islam or that he used the religion to guide his governance, but that he did so in an entirely unique manner. He also fought directly against Islamic parties and organizations that opposed *his* version of Islam, like the Muslim Brotherhood who he saw as a potential threat to his power, or what he called “a sabotage against the [meaning his] Revolution.”⁶⁵

It is important to note that the levers used by Gaddafi to achieve his goals were applied against a population that was at least initially open to the idea of allowing Islam to play a central role in their lives. Indeed, “in the national context of Libyan society, his emphasis on Islam is natural because religion has always been strong in Libya and has been an important part of the Libyan search for self-identity as well as a national expression of their struggle against foreign domination and control.”⁶⁶ The results of Gaddafi’s deployment of his highly personalized version of Islam to dominate the social fabric of Libya, would be to prolong and intensify the present conflict. After the fall of Gaddafi, “there resulted a governmental vacuum filled quickly by a miscellany of armed militias and other forces driven by political, religious jihadist, tribal, and geo-economic

⁶⁴ El-Khawas, “Qaddafi and Islam in Libya,” 64.

⁶⁵ El-Khawas, 65.

⁶⁶ El-Khawas, 68.

motivations, and they engaged in internecine violence aimed at protecting the interests important to them.”⁶⁷

Gaddafi’s insistence on stamping out any version of Islam contrary to his own directly led to the creation of the aforementioned splinter groups that would come to the fore after his death. A recent study of the current Government of National Accord (GNA) claims that “true power [in the GNA] remains with former members of the Libya Islamic Fighting Group, which fought an Islamist insurgency against Gadhafi in the 1990s, and with the militias.”⁶⁸ This finding indicates that current governmental actors were able to harness whatever organizational capabilities remained from their days of fighting with the Gaddafi regime. Additionally, this same study described the “rebellious eastern regions that have traditionally represented the core of the Islamist opposition [that] sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s” are now “focused primarily in and around the eastern cities of Benghazi, Derna and Ajdabia.”⁶⁹

These rebellious groups pushed back against the Gaddafi regime as best they could, though the results were less than what the rebels expected. Indeed, “since the Islamist uprisings of the late 1980s and mid-1990s the [Gaddafi] regime has followed a deliberate policy of punishing the eastern regions by keeping them in a perpetual state of underdevelopment.”⁷⁰ In addition to political and economic marginalization, opposition to Gaddafi would have religious consequences for the present-day population. This alienation created “concentrations of tribal and jihadist populations deeply resentful of the state after so many years of exclusion from political engagement and economic resources by Qaddafi’s regime, making them a potential ISIS military ally.”⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ronen, “Libya,” 112.

⁶⁸ *Strategic Comments*, “Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya”, vol. 22, 2016, 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2016.1159823>.

⁶⁹ *Strategic Comments*, “Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya”, 1.

⁷⁰ Pargeter, “Localism and Radicalization in North Africa: Local Factors and the Development of Political Islam in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya,” 1036.

⁷¹ Ronen, “Libya,” 112.

In a somewhat unusual set of circumstances, the Gaddafi regime did allow at least one strand of Islamism to prosper within Libya. A Saudi-inspired Salafi group known as Madkhalis edged their way onto the scene in an impressive manner. Though the genesis of the group's clout in Libya can be traced to Gaddafi himself, "after realizing the advantages of a Salafi current that preached against political dissent, the Gaddafi regime allowed Madkhalism to expand."⁷² Although the group would seem to align itself with other Islamist-centric organizations, they are opposed to nearly every other secular and religious group. Madkhalis' unusual strand of Islamism makes them "fiercely opposed to both nonviolent political Islamists and violent jihadist groups" and "makes common enemies of both the Islamic State and the Muslim Brotherhood."⁷³ In addition to their exclusionary policies, the next unusual aspect of the group is their immense popularity. So much so that "as of 2018, Libya's Madkhalis were estimated to number tens of thousands, making them the largest Salafi movement in the country."⁷⁴

Their influence is said to have drawn in at least one other prominent Islamist group operating inside Libya. The Radaa, "a self-styled Islamic police force,"⁷⁵ fights with other Islamist groups for control in Tripoli. With Tripoli being the center of fighting between Dawn and Dignity forces, Radaa's presence in the city raises the group's importance significantly. The link between Radaa and Madkhalis is that "many senior figures and foot soldiers within Radaa are dedicated Madkhalis, with some known to be particularly hardline."⁷⁶ Thus far, the literature cited above might give the impression that the Islamist trend has been a one-way street, with influence arriving from outside Libya to stir up sentiment within. However, understanding the importance of Libya's Islamist presence requires a look at both the outgoing products of this sentiment—and their eventual return.

⁷² International Crisis Group, "Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis" (Middle East and North Africa Report N°200, April 25, 2019), 5, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/200-libyas-madkhali-salafis.pdf>.

⁷³ International Crisis Group, "Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis."

⁷⁴ International Crisis Group, 5.

⁷⁵ *Strategic Comments*, "Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya", 1.

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group, "Addressing the Rise of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis," 16.

C. INTERNAL ISLAMIST GROUPS POST-GADDAFI

Entities within Libya export its fighters for conflicts throughout the Middle East, most notably to Iraq and Syria. As noted earlier, the factionalism of Libya's Islamists is reflected in their ideological makeup, which is tied to Libya's regionalism. "The vast majority of Libyan recruits who have gone to fight in Iraq are from the east," writes Alison Pargeter of London's RUSI. A 2007 study "found that of 88 Libyan recruits who had gone to Iraq, 60.2 per cent had come from Derna and 23.9 per cent from Benghazi."⁷⁷ These are coincidentally, and not surprisingly, the same areas that were chastised under the Gaddafi regime. Similarly, according to senior political scientist at RAND, Christopher S. Chivvis, "a group of these young men, known as the Bataar Brigade, returned from Syria to Derna, joined the radical Islamic Youth Shura Council and gradually took control of the town (and) ...in October 2014...pledged its allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi."⁷⁸

Gaddafi's removal in 2011 allowed long repressed and marginalized groups to come out into the open and to be joined by other imported strains of Islamism. Libyans could now import trends of Islamism of their choosing and could also export it as well. This cycle was made possible by proving grounds in Iraq and Syria, among other places, creating fertile ground for Islamist tendencies to flourish. This aspect was not lost on regional and transnational Islamist organizations seeking to take advantage of the situation. Three such organizations answered the call to include the Islamic State, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Ansar al-Sharia.

D. TRANSNATIONAL ISLAMIST ORGANIZATIONS

The so-called Islamic State's (IS) "expansion into Libya began in April 2014 in the eastern town of Derna," notes Chivvis. "Religiously pious, once powerful and yet marginalized politically and economically under Gadhafi, Derna was a hotbed of jihadi

⁷⁷ Pargeter, "Localism and Radicalization in North Africa: Local Factors and the Development of Political Islam in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya," 1043-44.

⁷⁸ Chivvis, "Countering the Islamic State in Libya," 115.

radicalism long before the Arab Spring.”⁷⁹ Not a group that commonly associates itself with limits or boundaries, IS therefore “also operates in Benghazi, Ajdabiyah, Tripoli, Misrata, Derna, Sabratha and likely in Libya’s more remote southern regions.”⁸⁰ This expansion effectively covers most of Libya’s population centers as well as a large swath of land across the coast and inland. Due to recent events, however, their grip on territory and people has loosened considerably.

We know where they come from. But who are these people? The short answer is that IS membership in Libya consists of converts from across the Muslim world. As such, “the Islamic State’s membership in Libya includes not only Libyans but also Tunisians, Algerians, Egyptians, Iraqis, Yemenis, Saudis, Nigerians and other nationalities.”⁸¹ A separate study conducted in 2016 added granularity by noting that IS also “found ready allies among former Gadhafi loyalists, bolstered by local volunteers and Islamists from Yemen, Mali, Syria and Tunisia. The UN estimates ISIS strength in Libya at 3,000, while the Pentagon gives a figure of 6,000.”⁸² With such a large amount of territory, a population ripe for strong leadership, a vacuum of state-provided law and order, and members from a wide range of the Muslim *umma*, the Islamic State would appear destined to ascendancy. Their exact trajectory in Libya, however, was less than assured and far from tranquil.

The first, and potentially largest obstacle to IS establishing a caliphate branch in Libya was competition from other Islamist entities set on achieving their version of an Islamic state. IS’ initial foray into Libya appears to recognize this hurdle and the group followed a strategy of using local proxy organizations. “In October 2014, a local jihadist group, the Islamic Youth Shura Council (*Shabab al-Islam*), claimed Derna in the name of IS, thus showing IS’s ability to break with traditional notions of territorial contiguity by creating an enclave outside its ‘borders’ in Syria and Iraq,” note two Belgian based

⁷⁹ Chivvis, 114.

⁸⁰ Chivvis, 117.

⁸¹ Chivvis, 117.

⁸² *Strategic Comments*, “Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya”, 2.

researchers.⁸³ This “Islamic Youth Shura Council was composed of elements of Ansar al-Shari’a’s Derna branch and several other militias: the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade; the February 17th Martyrs Brigade; The Shield of Libya; and Jaysh al-Mujahidin.”⁸⁴ The expansion would continue into the following year when the group set its sights on the western part of the country. Also “extremely important to the advancement of ISIS interests in Libya was the collaboration it established in the early months of 2015 with a local chapter of the jihadist Ansar al-Sharia, founded in 2013 in Sirte, which helped the organization to entrench its foothold in [Benghazi].”⁸⁵

With the seemingly relentless proliferation of the Islamic State in Libya, it initially appeared likely that the group would replicate its successes in Iraq and Syria and make its namesake a reality. However, the multitude of groups (some of the very same mentioned above) operating in Libya was simply too diverse, too numerous, and too covetous to allow IS’ bid for supremacy to go unchallenged. This tension meant that “although by 2016 ISIS had become the largest and fastest-growing jihadist group in Libya, it is not hegemonic and exists within a complex jihadist milieu. Many of Libya’s other major jihadist groups – the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade in Derna and Ansar al-Sharia, for example—are linked in one way or another to the Islamic State’s main regional competitor, AQIM.”⁸⁶

Al-Qaeda differs from the Islamic State in a few key areas that are paramount in understanding who they are and what they hope to achieve in Libya. The initial difference is that AQIM’s focus is on the threat from the West and Israel, which they label as the “far enemy.” IS, on the other hand, prioritizes rectifying what it perceives as an abomination of the Islamic faith by those who consider themselves Muslim. As their name would indicate, the Islamic State hopes to achieve just that, but so does AQIM—although they prioritize their enemies differently and have divergent strategies. As Foundation for the Defense of Democracies Senior Fellow Thomas Joscelyn puts it, “some assume that, unlike the Islamic

⁸³ Pektas and Leman, *Militant Jihadism*, 45.

⁸⁴ Pektas and Leman, 45.

⁸⁵ Ronen, “Libya,” 114.

⁸⁶ Chivvis, “Countering the Islamic State in Libya,” 119.

State, al Qaeda does not seek to control territory and build Islamic emirates (states). But this is an erroneous assumption. A wealth of evidence shows that this is, in fact, al Qaeda's primary goal. However, al Qaeda and the Islamic State have very different strategies for achieving this same end."⁸⁷ The two groups also differ in the way other jihadist groups view them and vice versa.

Al Qaeda is much more willing to absorb other Islamist forces into its ranks and these groups seem far more willing to work with Al Qaeda than they do with IS formations. Additionally, AQIM and other groups often openly oppose IS and ally with each other to rid the Libyan landscape of the Islamic State and its supporters. For example, "the jihadist organization led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the operational leader of the al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Murabitun organization in the Maghreb, which merged with AQIM in late 2015, also became involved in the jihadist war in Libya in an effort to weaken ISIS and strengthen al-Qaeda."⁸⁸ Additionally, Chivvis goes on to claim that "even if these groups are not taking direct orders from AQIM, they share facilitation and other networks, and membership in the organizations can overlap."⁸⁹

AQIM and its affiliates are not limited only to fighting ISIS, however, as they often battle with Field Marshal Haftar's LNA. Groups like "Ansar al Sharia and the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), both of which are part of the al Qaeda network, had led the jihadists in fighting against General Khalifa al Haftar's forces."⁹⁰ Joscelyn goes on to conclude that "this is yet another indication that al Qaeda-affiliated jihadists are using front groups and pooling their resources with other organizations inside Libya."⁹¹ Fighting on multiple fronts, AQIM and its associates certainly play a significant role in the current civil war and will likely influence any arrangement made thereafter. This is also true of AQIM's main ally, Ansar al-Sharia.

⁸⁷ Thomas Joscelyn, "Jihadist Groups Operating Inside Libya," 2.

⁸⁸ Ronen, "Libya," 118.

⁸⁹ Chivvis, "Countering the Islamic State in Libya," 119.

⁹⁰ Joscelyn, 6.

⁹¹ Joscelyn, 6.

Although the two organizations outlined above differ in their attempts to usher in a version of Islamic rule suitable to their needs, the basic method is armed struggle. Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), however, would (at least initially) differ in its approach. This distinction is clear in that, “initially, ASL launched a highly sophisticated program of *dawa* (outreach) which included the provisioning of social services both inside and outside of Libya.”⁹² Their outreach, reminiscent of the Muslim Brotherhood approach in Egypt and elsewhere, included everything from “anti-drug campaigns, blood drives and food drives...to Quranic competitions for children, housing projects for the poor, school cleanings, garbage removals and bridge repairs.”⁹³ The group’s seemingly charitable programs, however, were only an alternative means to a similar end: an Islamic society anchored in the tenets of sharia law.

ASL’s ideology was very closely aligned with that of IS and AQIM. Namely, Ansar al-Sharia placed an “immense emphasis on the *tawhid* (pure monotheism) of God,” that “if a Muslim does not follow the literal authority of God, then he is branded or “excommunicated” as a *kafir* (unbeliever).”⁹⁴ If these criteria were not met, the group compelled its adherents to a course of action that strongly resembled that of other extremist groups. Specifically, “the theological mechanism to purge the *Ummah* (Islamic community) of *kufir* and to implement *tawhid* is military jihad.”⁹⁵ One final similarity was the transnational aspect of the organization. In this regard, ASL acted as “a militia, a terrorist organization and a training base for foreign jihadists.”⁹⁶

E. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

With each Islamist group operating within and outside of Libya, international interaction was a natural and predictable phenomenon—both for the countries these groups

⁹² Zelin, “The Rise and Decline of Ansar Al-Sharia in Libya,” 104.

⁹³ Zelin, 107.

⁹⁴ Zelin, 108.

⁹⁵ Zelin, 109.

⁹⁶ Zelin, 105.

operated in as well as those with a vested interest in their security. What was perhaps less probable was the degree to which states became involved in the funding and support of the Islamist groups most aligned with their foreign policy objectives. Libya since 2011 has seen numerous exogenous interactions that have shaped the outcome of everything from individual battles to the nature and path of the entire conflict. To understand fully the Islamist environment, we must appreciate the multitude of international players involved in propping up these groups.

The Libya Dawn factions with their base of support centered in Tripoli are largely supported by Turkey and Qatar who favor the internationally recognized government led by Prime Minister Serraj. They oppose Haftar and, by virtue of sharing a common enemy, support the Islamist forces also fighting the LNA.⁹⁷ A separate report confirms this alliance and states that “Turkey, Qatar and Sudan have openly supported the Islamists in Tripoli. The Tobruk government has frequently accused Turkey, in particular, of ties to more radical Islamist forces, including Ansar al-Sharia.”⁹⁸

Opposing this consortium, Haftar has the backing of Zintan militias collectively known as Dignity forces. “Its leaders cooperate with Haftar, but do not accept his direct command. The HOR and Dignity are supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.”⁹⁹ Though not directly aligned with Haftar, several non-Muslim nations also confront Islamic entities. “Special forces from at least four Western nations (US, UK, France, and Italy) are reportedly operating inside Libya currently [2017].”¹⁰⁰ With differing intentions and varying levels of support, the international actors do share one commonality: they are all invariably part of the problem. In other words, “foreign actors that actively intervene in the Libyan theatre of war further fuel the fighting and re-enforce Libya’s disintegration, with devastating consequences.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Strategic Comments*, “Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya”, 1.

⁹⁸ Chivvis, “Countering the Islamic State in Libya,” 126.

⁹⁹ *Strategic Comments*, “Confronting Failed Government and the Islamic State in Libya”, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Joscelyn, “Jihadist Groups Operating Inside Libya,” 6.

¹⁰¹ Ronen, “Libya,” 123.

F. CONCLUSION

Islam has long been central to the Libyan people. This connection to the religion was used by powers outside of Libya as well as its own indigenous leaders and continues to be manipulated by factions involved in the current conflict. This chapter has examined the way in which Islam has affected Libyan history and how groups today are still shaped by those contours. The following chapter will examine the current events from 2011 forward to the present to include factions within and outside Libya's environs.

IV. STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE POST-2011 ENVIRONMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed the difficult history of Libya up to 2011 when an international military operation coupled with an internal uprising removed Muammar Gaddafi from power. Though unquestionably tumultuous and undeniably challenging, the history of Libya from that point forward would rival its past in size and scope of destruction. The civil war is still raging in mid-2020 and the world appears to be no closer to a stable Libya than it has at any point throughout the conflict. What caused this morass? How did the removal of an unstable leader lead to even further instability? And who are the new parties both within and outside of Libya's borders that are prolonging hostilities? Where does the United States and its interests fit into the equation?

This chapter identifies the current situation in Libya, explains the core concern of ongoing competition for control, and explores the United States' goals and opportunities as well as those of its allies and adversaries. This is accomplished by first introducing a brief summary of the events from 2011 through 2019. The evolution of the current political, economic, and social landscape in the shadow of civil war will be described. Next, a detailed look at the multitude of internal and external actors vying for control is undertaken. Finally, this chapter concludes with a synopsis of U.S. interests and goals in the conflict. Attention will be paid specifically to understanding both the friends and rivals of the United States and how Washington can and should apply its instruments of national power. In Chapter V, these factors are examined with the ultimate goal of identifying which are advantageous and which merely contribute to the conflict's seeming intractability.

B. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FACTIONS

Following the death of Gaddafi, the natural inclination of people around the globe—and certainly those within Libya—was to yearn for brighter days ahead. Initially, there was some genuine hope for the state. Directly following Gaddafi's removal, as Middle East analyst Frederic Wehrey states, "Libyans finally had a say in their affairs" by

holding “elections for municipal councils—an important test run for national voting” and were backed in their efforts and desires by the United States, Europe, and the United Nations.¹⁰² The organization created to shepherd the transformation of Libya’s political future was the National Transition Council (NTC). Unfortunately, this body was “marked by opacity, internal clashes, and mismanagement” while still having the difficult and necessary requirement to “insist that it was not a new regime nor would it become one.”¹⁰³ The NTC’s reliance on militias for protection and enforcing its authority would lay the groundwork for a factional split between the more Islamist-leaning factions centered principally in Tripoli, although also present in Misrata, Zintan, and elsewhere, and those with a larger degree of secular nature from the east. The council’s successors would prove to be no more conciliatory or unifying due in large part to the overwhelming number and power of these militias.

Initially, the “transitional government started doling out payments to the militias” in an effort to “project its authority across the country,” Wehrey continues.¹⁰⁴ with unintended and largely negative results. Indeed, “lacking the will or ability to disband the militias, Libya’s new central government instead attempted to incorporate them into the state security structure, a largely futile endeavor. Barr and Gartenstein-Ross claim that the proliferation of unaccountable militias contributed to a climate of lawlessness in some parts of Libya.”¹⁰⁵ With the environmental backdrop of a weak central authority, a proliferation of armed and funded militias, and a dearth of knowledge and experience in democratic practices, the fledgling NTC nonetheless held nationwide elections in the middle of 2012.

For all of the potential for continued conflict and competition, however, the elections themselves were largely successful. Jacob Mundy asserts that this is evident by the fact that “all in all, over 2.5 million Libyans participated in the elections for the Congress, representing 80 percent of potential voters; over 1.6 million of these were

¹⁰² Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, 72.

¹⁰³ Mundy, *Libya*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, “Dignity and Dawn,” 7.

women.”¹⁰⁶ A 2014 *Strategic Comments* article adds that the General National Congress (GNC) was officially formed in October of 2012 and set out to enact two of its main objectives: “to create a parallel army, the Libya Shield, and to purge senior Gadhafi-era officials from the administration (the so-called Isolation Law).”¹⁰⁷ But this success proved ephemeral and any elation after the elections would be short-lived as the new governmental body faced very substantial obstacles.

As Mohammed El-Katiri, Research Fellow at the UK Defense Academy notes, “a key challenge confronting the interim government in Libya [was] the creation of political institutions to provide for the functioning of an effective democratic state. The interim government [was], in effect, inheriting a stateless state.”¹⁰⁸ Couple this transitional political environment with a security situation replete with armed groups each possessing unique and often contradictory views on the status of former Gaddafi supporters, the role of Islam in public discourse, and with limited financial resources, not surprisingly discord and competition for control was the inevitable result. Permeating the entire setting are “elements of ... tribal dynamics (which) remain in the post-revolution environment, and in the interests of stability and the avoidance of further conflict, their management and mitigation are every bit as important as they were during the reigns of King Idris and Qadhafi himself.”¹⁰⁹

These factors would combine to create a violent and disruptive environment that characterizes Libya to the present day. An inkling of the contentious future of Libya would occur when “armed militias undertook a two-week siege of the foreign and justice ministries in Tripoli in April-May 2013 to pressure the parliament to pass a ‘political isolation’ law.”¹¹⁰ It was the first example of an armed group flexing its military muscle

¹⁰⁶ Mundy, *Libya*, 124.

¹⁰⁷ *Strategic Comments* “Libya’s Civil War: The Essential Briefing,” 20, no. 10 (November 26, 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2014.1019243>.

¹⁰⁸ El-Katiri, *State-Building Challenges in a Post-Revolution Libya*, vii

¹⁰⁹ El-Katiri.

¹¹⁰ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, “Dignity and Dawn,” 7.

to achieve political ends, but it would unfortunately not be the last. A prominent figure in contemporary Libyan military and political circles would take a step in 2013 that would lock the country into the protracted civil war and usher in a new phase to the conflict with even more chaos, international involvement, and bloodshed.

On the 16th of May, 2014, General Khalifa Haftar, “a former officer in Qaddafi’s military who defected during Libya’s ill-fated war in Chad, launched Operation Dignity in the city of Benghazi...designed to eliminate Islamist factions from eastern Libya.”¹¹¹ Haftar’s stated intent had been to eject Islamist elements from the country, though his focus would quickly shift to include the elimination of Islamic-leaning factions from the elected government. His Operation Dignity “gained support from allies in the Kufra region, coastal Tripolitania, the Nafusa, and the Fezzan,”¹¹² and set out to remove Islamist factions wherever they were to be found.

The most dramatic consequence of this quest was that it pitted Haftar and those allied with him against that of the elected government, and the Islamists. Because the “militias fighting Haftar were politically, or at least ideologically, aligned with the Islamist-backed coalition...controlling the Congress, it was easy enough for Haftar’s opponents to claim that Operation Dignity had in fact declared war on the central government.”¹¹³ In an effort to counter this pressure, “militias reformed into Libya Dawn, declaring themselves not Islamists but revolutionaries, dedicated to the original goals of the February 2011 revolution.”¹¹⁴ From that point forward, the largest and most significant division had been solidified between the forces that would represent opposing sides for years to come.

Legitimacy and brutal methods aside, Haftar’s operation was successful in that it persuaded voters to usher in a more secular-minded regime. Due to his pressure, the “25 June parliamentary elections...resulted in electoral gains for a nationalist-federalist

¹¹¹ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, 7.

¹¹² Mundy, *Libya*, 160.

¹¹³ Mundy, 161.

¹¹⁴ “Libya’s Civil War,” 1.

coalition hostile to the Islamist-Misratan bloc's agenda."¹¹⁵ Presently, Field Marshall Haftar controls large swaths of Libyan territory through his command of the Libyan National Army (LNA) and his backing by the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) as well as various international donors. These actions ultimately resulted in a continued battle for legitimacy, power, control, resources, finances, and international recognition that defines Libya's current reality.

With the lines drawn between the internationally recognized government headquartered in Tripoli and the House of Representatives centered in Tobruk, the conflict from roughly mid-2014 until now has been defined by these basic two opponents as militias with shifting loyalties float in and out. The natural question is why, in the words of Ted Carpenter, "instead of becoming a stable, democratic country" has "post-Gaddafi Libya...degenerated into an arena of violent anarchy among numerous rival militias," and what would lend credibility to the admonishment that "Libya is now is now referred to as "Somalia on the Mediterranean"?¹¹⁶ There are indeed several explanations.

Jacob Mundy argues that "the main driver of the civil war at the national level was nonetheless political in nature: who would be allowed to define and lead the post-revolutionary state of Libya."¹¹⁷ A study conducted by the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) contends that "the factors underpinning the civil war are complex, involving regional, tribal, political, and religious fault lines that often both overlap and conflict with one another to create a dizzying array of allegiances and rivalries."¹¹⁸ The authors of the report go on to assert that "indeed, the conflict can be seen through several different lenses: revolutionaries against members of the *ancien régime*,

¹¹⁵ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, "Dignity and Dawn," 7.

¹¹⁶ Ted Galen Carpenter, "Paved with Good Intentions: How Washington Created the Libya Hell," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (December 2018): 19.

¹¹⁷ Mundy, *Libya*, 178.

¹¹⁸ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, "Dignity and Dawn," 7.

political Islamists against secular nationalists, and ethnic Arabs against Berbers and other non-Arabs.”¹¹⁹

While the root causes and the goals of the various parties and factions may be in dispute, the results cannot be in doubt. Getting straight to the point, the previously mentioned 2018 article written by Ted Carpenter argues “the one common feature of the various parliaments, cabinets, and militias that are competing for power in Libya is that virtually none of them exhibit much commitment to either secularism or democracy, much less to both values. Instead,” he claims “there is a pronounced trend toward various types of authoritarianism, often with a distinct Islamist overlay.”¹²⁰ In complete agreement with this sentiment is the aforementioned ICCT report that states “The Dignity-Dawn clash has contributed to the deterioration of the Libyan state, creating ungoverned spaces that are being exploited by violent non-state actors.”¹²¹

C. INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

With so much confusion as about the origins and evolution of the Libyan conflict, or the goals of its protagonists, coupled with a history of destruction and bleak outlook on the future, it would seem evident that the international community would want to give “the Somalia of the Mediterranean” a wide berth. This, however, is exactly the opposite of what happened. For various reasons and to differing degrees, there would soon be no shortage of overseas assistance being offered to the factions within Libya’s borders. In this way, international interference has not only prolonged Libya’s conflict. It has also intensified it. Capturing this sentiment is Alan Kuperman who concluded that “NATO’s action magnified the conflict’s duration about sixfold and its death toll at least sevenfold, . . . while also exacerbating human rights abuses, humanitarian suffering, Islamic radicalism, and weapons proliferation in Libya and its neighbors.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, 7.

¹²⁰ Ted Galen Carpenter, “Paved with Good Intentions: How Washington Created the Libya Hell,” 30.

¹²¹ Barr and Gartenstein-Ross, “Dignity and Dawn,” 8.

¹²² Kuperman quoted in: Ted Galen Carpenter, “Paved with Good Intentions: How Washington Created the Libya Hell,” 36.

Just as the internal reasons for the conflict's genesis are somewhat opaque, so too, are the reasons for the involvement of external actors. Beginning with a look at the West, Mundy states that "terrorism and migration were indeed front and center when it came to the U.S. and European agenda for Libya in 2015 and 2016."¹²³ The terrorism/Islamist element in the war will be considered in more detail later. Notwithstanding, the West had additional reasons for weighing in on the conflict. A 2019 report released by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) states that "the United Kingdom and Italy support the [Government of National Accord]. Italy has funded several Libya Dawn militias and...has resulted in migration from Libya to Italy being cut by 80%." Additionally, "the UK took a lead role in creating the GNA and remains an enthusiastic supporter, claiming that it offers the best hope for a power-sharing unity government."¹²⁴

As could be expected, any involvement of the West would naturally evoke a response from Moscow. Mundy concludes that "after several years on the sidelines, Russia began taking a more active interest in the Libyan civil war in 2016."¹²⁵ Additionally, significant is the IISS claim that "Moscow perceives support for the LNA as a chance to expand its footprint in the Middle East," as Russia "welcomed Haftar onboard its aircraft carrier in January 2017."¹²⁶ Adding a depth of analysis to this understanding is Mundy when he expands on his above statement by asserting that, in 2017: "though Moscow was not yet willing to violate the UN arms embargo openly, covert forms of Russian military involvement in Libya's civil war—material aid and intelligence assistance via special forces, private contractors, and Egyptian and Emirati proxies—began to parallel the kind of shadowy counterterrorism assistance being rendered by France, Britain, Italy, and the United States in the fight against the Islamic State."¹²⁷

¹²³ Mundy, *Libya*, 183.

¹²⁴ *Strategic Comments* "Libya's Conflict," 25, no. 5 (May 28, 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13567888.2019.1645935>.

¹²⁵ Mundy, *Libya*, 198.

¹²⁶ "Libya's Conflict," 2.

¹²⁷ Mundy, *Libya*, 201.

Mundy's assessment ushers in the need to examine an additional element of the international community—the regional actors to include Turkey, the Gulf States, and Libya's direct neighbors, most notably Egypt. For these states, geographic proximity gives the fight an additional element of urgency. Libya also offers these regional competitors another arena to hash out longstanding rivalries through the use of proxy forces. Porous borders, little to no attribution, and a concern for regional stability all drive these forces to participate in Libya's civil war.

D. REGIONAL ACTOR INVOLVEMENT

A general overview must determine who is supporting who and why? The IISS report introduced above states that “Libya's war is to an extent a proxy conflict waged between rival Sunni regional blocs. Haftar enjoys the material support of Egypt and the UAE, two powers who, along with Saudi Arabia, announced in June 2017 an embargo of Qatar, demanding among other things that it cut ties with Islamist groups including the Muslim Brotherhood. Qatar and Turkey support Libya Dawn and the GNA.”¹²⁸ In this way, the Sunni-controlled Gulf states plus Egypt line up on one side, against the unlikely combination of a regional oddball and often-cited supporter of Islamist movements in Qatar and an equally idiosyncratic player in Turkey.

The group of Sunni majority states place their weight behind Field Marshal Haftar due to his commitment to fight Islamic extremist elements that, if left unchecked, could threaten their interests if not directly pose a threat inside their borders. Indeed, experts within the United States recognized these regional concerns and stated in 2016 that “criminals and terrorist groups, including ISIS, al-Qaeda and so many others, take advantage of the chaos, securing their own territory and using Libya as a launching pad for smuggling, human trafficking, and terror attacks—endangering Libya's neighbors, such as Egypt and Tunisia.”¹²⁹ The logic follows that if Haftar is the only force—or the only

¹²⁸ “Libya's Conflict,” 1.

¹²⁹ The Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Libya: Five Years After Ghadafi,” 2.

capable force—combatting the regional threat posed by these organizations, then it only makes sense to support him irrespective of who or what groups the United Nations support.

On the other end of the game board is the UN-backed government (GNA) under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj. Though the UN recognizes the primacy of this governmental body, it does little in the way of direct support in its fight against Haftar’s forces. As mentioned above, the majority of support the GNA does receive comes from Qatar and Turkey. The United States Congress stated flatly that “Qatar and Turkey have provided support to Islamist militias fighting the LNA, fostering a dangerous network of armed militias across the country.”¹³⁰ According to a 2020 *Bloomberg* article, support for the GNA came to a crescendo when “Turkey’s parliament authorized the government to deploy troops to back Libya’s internationally recognized administration against rival forces”¹³¹ in January of 2020.

Adding an additional layer of complexity to an already dynamic regional contest is how Libya’s instability affects its southern neighbors. Libya is nested in a region where France was once a dominant colonial power, and where Paris maintains interests. No surprise then that Paris would support the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. Therefore, because France “considers the LNA a bulwark against terrorism” they are “alarmed by militant activity in its former North African colonies of Algeria, Chad, Morocco, Niger and Tunisia” and “has deployed special forces to cooperate with Haftar.”¹³² Regional dynamics and considerations are unquestionably a factor in the current network of players in Libya’s civil war.

The net effect of these considerations is a confusing web of involvement from within the country that extend outward, through direct neighbors, and ultimately involves more powerful and influential international actors. Lines between supporting and

¹³⁰ The Committee on Foreign Affairs, “The Conflict in Libya,” 4.

¹³¹ Selcan Hacaoglu, “Erdogan Wins One-Year Mandate to Send Turkey Troops to Libya,” *Bloomberg Wire Service*; *New York*, January 2, 2020, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2331790346/abstract/FA00E5C1D4384219PQ/1>.

¹³² “Libya’s Conflict,” 2.

supported, clear outcomes, and reasons for involvement evade simple answers. Additionally, these alliances as well as amount and types of support have morphed over time and will likely continue to do so until the conflict is concluded. This ingrained uncertainty and shift in nature and level of support for internal groups is perhaps no more evident than in the case of the United States.

E. THE UNITED STATES' INVOLVEMENT

While the United States has not played an outsized role in Libya, its contributions have been analogous to that of most other Western nations. The United States began its involvement in the current civil war at the outset of the regional popular uprisings collectively known as the Arab Spring. Amid this social upheaval, NATO, with a contingent of U.S. air assets, “waged a small but remarkable war against the Libyan regime of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi”¹³³ notes RAND author Karl Mueller and his colleagues. They go on to state that “through its intervention, the coalition stemmed and then reversed the tide of Libya’s civil war, preventing Qaddafi from crushing the nascent rebel movement seeking to overthrow his dictatorship.”¹³⁴ This RAND Corporation report goes on to show that the United States “emerged victorious from a conflict against a small dictatorship facing significant internal unrest” and that “the speed and agility of the intervention in a rapidly developing crisis far surpassed widespread expectations about what was realistically possible.”¹³⁵

It should be noted that the above report considered the United States’ military invention a success due to the short-term achievement of the stated goal: to oust Gaddafi by committing only air power. A 2016 article published in *Mediterranean Quarterly* dissented from this optimistic outlook, opining that “US leaders seemed inclined to repeat many of the same errors that George W. Bush’s administration had committed in Iraq. Once again, the United States was leading an effort to overthrow the longtime secular dictator of

¹³³ *Precision and Purpose* (RAND Corporation, 2015), 1, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR676.html.

¹³⁴ *Precision and Purpose*, 1.

¹³⁵ *Precision and Purpose*, 1.

a very fragile, artificial country, based on little more than a hope that the aftermath would be more stable and democratic.”¹³⁶ Put more bluntly, the author—CATO Institute’s Ted Galen—asserts that “by any reasonable measure, the U.S. military crusade in Libya produced a calamity.”¹³⁷

While the author and the institution he represents may be suspected of political bias in a desire to discredit the Obama Administration and its Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a more moderately conservative publication drew similar conclusions. In 2016, *The Economist* proved prophetic in its assertion that “the West is lining up friendly militias to battle the jihadists, while occasionally striking them from the air. This [strategy] risks exacerbating divisions in the country. Everyone wants to be the peshmerga of Libya...’the problem is that having several peshmerga means not having a unified country’.”¹³⁸ Unfavorable assessments for the United States’ direct military intervention in the ostensible name of dictatorial removal and support for citizens’ democratic sentiments can be found in nearly every scholarly article dedicated to that end, save the lone RAND Corporation report referenced above.

However, it is difficult to argue with the consequences. The common theme in these assertions is that whatever short-term gains were achieved by military intervention quickly dissipated and were instead found to be detrimental to the cause of peace. These accusations are not the first to be leveled against Washington as Iraq cast a long shadow over intervention in Libya. In addition to an apparent case of shortsightedness, the accusation is that United States policy toward Libya has been waffling and inconsistent. While the Obama White House supported Tripoli’s Government of National Accord (GNA), under President Trump, the United States has executed a 180-degree shift and (at least verbally) shifted support to Field Marshal Haftar in the east. In April of 2019 President Trump spoke with Haftar and subsequently issued a statement that he (Trump) “recognized... Haftar’s significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya’s oil

¹³⁶ Ted Galen Carpenter, “Paved with Good Intentions: How Washington Created the Libya Hell,” 24.

¹³⁷ Ted Galen Carpenter, 19.

¹³⁸ *The Economist*; London “Libya’s Civil War; Unity, up to a Point,” 419, no. 8984 (April 9, 2016): 2.

resources, and the two discussed a shared vision for Libya's transition to a stable, democratic political system."¹³⁹ Though outwardly opposed to the stance of his predecessor, "Trump's encouragement [for Haftar] is in tune with his general alignment with Haftar's allies Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE" and also links U.S. support with "that of two of the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council – France and Russia."¹⁴⁰

Leaders within the United States government present a pessimistic view of the situation. In a 2016 brief to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the chairman of Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, concluded that "Libya is embroiled in a difficult civil war that shows no sign of abatement." Additionally, troublesome is that "Libya is more politically divided than ever, its economy is in a free fall, and terrorist groups and criminals continue to exploit the power vacuum."¹⁴¹ The overwhelming consensus is that while the reasons for the conflict may be murky, the consequences for Libya are unquestionably disastrous.

The theme in U.S. foreign policy toward the Libyan civil war is one of shifting alliances and unclear desires. The approaches taken by members of the EU as well as regional actors, however, has been more consistent and transparent. If an end to the hostilities is in the best interest of these states and organizations, some level of unanimity is certainly in order. If that is not possible, at least the United States should be consistent in its messaging and approach towards the involved factions.

¹³⁹ "Libya's Conflict," 2.

¹⁴⁰ "Libya's Conflict," 2.

¹⁴¹ H.R., *Libya: Five Years After Ghadafi*, 1–2.

V. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PERSISTENCE OF LIBYA’S CIVIL WAR

A. INTRODUCTION

There is an extensive body of scholarly literature on the phenomena of civil wars defined as an armed conflicts between opposing groups of citizens or regions within the same country. This body of literature seeks to understand why such wars start, what allows them to persist, how they are best brought to a close, the prospects of peace, as well as a multitude of other relevant and significant characteristics. In most academic undertakings, case studies are used to identify prominent features, compared and contrasted against similar instances, and lessons learned are extracted from the examples. But while civil wars share some common features, they are all unique to their time, place, and context.

This chapter examines the literature on civil wars in general and identifies which components possess a high degree of explanatory power in the case of Libya since 2011. The chapter is divided into four sections: the first focuses on understanding the nature of civil wars in general. The second segment identifies scholars who assert internal factors are the most prevalent in explaining the existence and persistence of civil wars while the third section looks at sources that name external factors as culprit(s). Following the introduction of a particular work in the internal or external “camps” mentioned above, this chapter then takes these broad arguments and applies them to the situation present in Libya and assess their explanatory validity. The Chapter concludes with a brief summary of the most valuable explanations.

The argument of this thesis is that Libya is a unique case that blends pre-existing internal conditions with a perfect storm of external intervention that has intensified the violence of the conflict while making its resolution far more problematic. After years of seesawing military confrontations, shifting and altering alliances, large amounts of foreign involvement, and countless lives lost, why is Libya still mired in a civil war? Why, in the words of Jacob Kathman and Megan Shannon, is Libya considered a “‘hurting stalemate’—

where neither side can defeat the other, but each side can prevent its rival from prevailing”?¹⁴²

Civil wars are becoming more destructive, lasting longer, and are more common than intra-state wars. Most importantly, as Patrick Brandt and his colleagues note in a 2008 article, “the duration of a civil war was the strongest single predictor of whether it would end in a negotiated settlement or a decisive victory for either side: the longer a war lasts, the less likely it is to end in victory for either side.”¹⁴³ This is unwelcomed news considering Libya’s conflict has already lasted at the time of writing for almost a decade and shows few signs of concluding in the coming years.

B. INTERNAL FACTORS

Michael Schumacher and Peter Schraeder set out in a 2019 study to “explore whether countries or geographical regions experiencing various forms of political unrest, such as North Africa during the Arab Spring, exhibit greater levels of violence by violent non-state actors.”¹⁴⁴ Their findings indicate that the political unrest following the Arab Spring caused a massive proliferation of terrorist groups within Libya (as well as other North African states) and those groups spurred further unrest. Indeed, Schumacher and Schraeder claim that “in the five years preceding the Arab Spring (2006–10), North Africa experienced on average a mere 0.8 insurgent attacks per year (fewer than one insurgent attack per year).”¹⁴⁵

These low numbers were assuredly due to the totalitarian grip on power possessed by Gaddafi and his henchmen who kept a tight lid on dissent. However, “this number

¹⁴² Mason and Mitchell, *What Do We Know About Civil Wars?*, 8.

¹⁴³ Patrick T. Brandt et al., “When and How the Fighting Stops: Explaining the Duration and Outcome of Civil Wars,” *Defence and Peace Economics* 19, no. 6 (December 2008): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10242690701823267>.

¹⁴⁴ Michael J. Schumacher and Peter J. Schraeder, “The Evolving Impact of Violent Non-State Actors on North African Foreign Policies During the Arab Spring: Insurgent Groups, Terrorists and Foreign Fighters,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 24, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 682, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2018.1525014>.

¹⁴⁵ Schumacher and Schraeder, 685.

increased in the five years (2011–15) following the beginning of the Arab Spring to a regional average of 35.6 insurgent attacks per year. This represented a forty-five-fold increase in insurgent activity from pre- to post-Arab Spring.”¹⁴⁶ Therefore, one may conclude that Gaddafi’s overthrow definitely contributed to the increasing turmoil and destabilization of the region.

Schumacher and Schraeder’s findings are particularly helpful in making sense of the insurgent group dynamics at play within Libya. They note that these insurgent groups are “typically lacking a coherent vision of the future beyond the more immediate goal of overthrowing the regime in power” and are therefore “unable to reestablish centralized states after achieving victory.” They conclude by claiming that this situation often leads “to the continuation of conflict among competing insurgent leaders and their respective armies” and that “in the aftermath of the Arab Spring...the most extreme variant of warlord insurgencies—successful regime overthrow but with rival insurgent factions unable to recreate a functioning centralized state—would be realized in the case of Libya.”¹⁴⁷

Even before the Arab Spring, however, some scholars argued that the internal make-up of a particular state was of vital importance in understanding how civil wars both begin and conclude. The Brandt et al. study asserts that “the characteristics of the civil war that explain how a civil war ends—in a rebel victory, a government victory, or a negotiated settlement—should be considered as predictors of the duration of the war, along with those attributes of the nation itself that made it susceptible to civil war onset in the first place.”¹⁴⁸

One such attribute the authors highlight is oil. The revenue generated by Libya’s petroleum deposits is certainly an important prize in the eyes of the many factions vying for control. The same authors find that “countries that derive one-third or more of their export revenues from oil are over 6900% more likely to see civil wars end in quick government victories. This suggests that oil exports provide the government with revenues

¹⁴⁶ Schumacher and Schraeder, 685.

¹⁴⁷ Schumacher and Schraeder, 685.

¹⁴⁸ Brandt et al., “When and How the Fighting Stops,” 6.

to build a strong military that makes it more difficult for the rebels to prevail.”¹⁴⁹ The fact that the oil is not possessed by the government erases the likelihood that the conflict will be brought to a swift conclusion.

Echoing the importance of large revenue sources such as oil, a 2012 study conducted by Aysegul Aydin and Patrick Regan found that “governments that can extract resources from the populace as in high GDP societies expect to prevail against the rebels on the battlefield. Therefore, they might be less likely to give in to rebel demands and prefer a decisive victory to negotiated outcomes which would also contribute to war duration.”¹⁵⁰ Here again, the difficulty in who possesses the oil becomes the important factor. An end to the hostilities is directly linked to who controls the oil. In the case of Libya, oil has favored a continuation of the conflict, because it has taken it out of the government’s hands and given various non-government actors the resources needed to continue fighting.

So, if oil has been the great equalizer that has helped to prolong Libya’s conflict, perhaps a more salient factor is group dynamics within Libya. In a multi-factional civil war, how does one group or coalition emerge victorious? Krause argues in his *Rebel Power* book that “groups in national movements face a dual struggle. They engage in ‘wars of movement’ to achieve common strategic goals characterized by collective-action challenges...while they simultaneously engage in ‘wars of position’ with rivals in their movement for organizational dominance.” He further asserts that “the internal balance of power is the most significant variable driving group behavior and movement outcomes.”¹⁵¹

Krause’s work also helps to predict the amount of associated violence that can be expected from these group interactions by arguing that in fragmented movements, “there is less pursuit of victory and more counterproductive violence, making such movements

¹⁴⁹ Brandt et al., 27.

¹⁵⁰ Aydin and Regan, “Networks of Third-Party Interveners and Civil War Duration,” 576.

¹⁵¹ Krause, *Rebel Power*, 17.

far less successful.” He concludes that “the costs and benefits of victory make stronger groups more likely to pursue it, but the costs and benefits of violence make weaker groups more likely to employ it.”¹⁵² This finding indicates that energy is essentially wasted on soothing internal dissent. This is energy that therefore cannot be applied to fighting external groups, and thus creating more violence and fewer results.

A final reason for the persistence of civil war in Libya has been the toxic heritage of Gaddafi’s rule and the second and third- order effects it created. In a 2016 essay, *New York Times* reporter Alex Marshall notes that “certain states for historical reasons—most notably the internal process of deliberately ‘coup-proofing’ their domestic militaries, via dispersing the means of violence among the population as a whole—may also lead them to being structured in such a way that, in the event of the collapse of central authority, militias and private security actors are inevitably destined to play a central role in the struggle that follows.”¹⁵³ He goes on to state that “Libya certainly constitutes an arch-example of this conflict dynamic.”¹⁵⁴ The more armed groups present during the time of the central authority’s collapse, the more violence proliferates and becomes endemic, as “these actors resort to armed violence to advance their interests.”¹⁵⁵ But their goals may not always include reassembling the state, especially in a fissiparous and contrived colonial entity like Libya.

Instead, University of Sussex Professors Andrea Carboni and James Moody contend that “distinct subnational political orders have emerged in Libya since 2014 in which actors engage in state-making practices driven by local interests.”¹⁵⁶ The operative word is “local.” This is in direct contrast to a number of other civil wars where the object of a groups’ efforts is the replication of a unified state—albeit one reunified and

¹⁵² Krause, 25.

¹⁵³ Alex Marshall, “From Civil War to Proxy War: Past History and Current Dilemmas,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129172>.

¹⁵⁴ Marshall, 190.

¹⁵⁵ Carboni and Moody, “Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War,” 463.

¹⁵⁶ Carboni and Moody, 456.

administered according to the vision of the victorious group. Carboni and Moody argue that when the unification is either not possible or not desired, groups fragment and focus on achieving and maintaining local or regional power.

With Gaddafi's fall, local militias and sub-national governmental bodies sprang up across Libya and began to compete for power. "National and local political considerations interact to motivate or constrain armed groups from fragmenting and perpetrating violence," insist Carboni and Moody. "Consequently, the relationship between violence and armed group fragmentation is the product of locally situated political opportunities."¹⁵⁷ In areas where the central government is nonexistent, groups look out for themselves and focus little attention on state-wide consolidation. "The result is a high level of opposition fragmentation that prolongs and complicates violent political transitions. Armed group fragmentation often goes hand-in-hand with the decentralization of security and territorial control."¹⁵⁸ A current map of territorial control in Libya would unquestionably support their findings.

However, an additional characteristic in Libya is that the state (such as it is) interacts with the myriad groups vying for influence in certain areas so that "state versus non-state actors is only one of many conflict dyads, as militia and community groups have been locked in local and regional contests with each other preceding 2014."¹⁵⁹ This situation is not unique to Libya, however, as "in most instances, the state in Africa possesses a quasi-monopoly on the use of violence, exercising it in coordination with, or parallel to, a plethora of non-state actors, intermediate elites and local strongmen."¹⁶⁰

The authors go on to declare that the struggle is not simply the state versus non-state actors, Haftar against the Islamists, or proxy forces fighting their benefactors' enemies, but rather that "these conflict dynamics and political developments on the ground

¹⁵⁷ Carboni and Moody, 457.

¹⁵⁸ Carboni and Moody, 456–57.

¹⁵⁹ Carboni and Moody, 459.

¹⁶⁰ Carboni and Moody, 459–60.

suggest that a series of local political orders have emerged in Libya in which ‘violence is not simply used to mount or repress total military challenges to state power, but instead is a flexible tool in pursuit of numerous political, economic, and social goals’.”¹⁶¹ The result is that, “rather than characterized by a lack of governance, the political landscape in Libya is constrained by an ‘overproduction of governance’ whereby the language of politics is violence.”¹⁶²

With so many armed groups bent on control of their particular geographical aspirations, it would seem natural that the more groups involved would equate to more violence. However, according to Carboni and Moody, “the data display another counter-intuitive trend. The number of conflict agents contributing to violence has periodically fluctuated, but has not increased significantly since the outbreak of the war.”¹⁶³ Their study of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) numbers included 2,728 violent events and 8,433 conflict-related fatalities during the period under review.¹⁶⁴ Their results showed that “rather than implying an absolutist understanding of the conflict process where many ‘frenzied’ militias concomitantly escalate violence, national-level data do not support the claim that the proliferation of non-state armed groups has increased overall levels of violence in the Libyan conflict from 2014 to 2017.”¹⁶⁵

The authors go on to specify conditions present in the three pre-statehood areas of Libya: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. Regarding Tripolitania, Carboni and Moody conclude that “the *raison d’être* is less about governing or establishing an alternative ruling coalition and more focused on maintaining short-term patrimonial relations with the [Presidential Council] and shoring up a patchwork of local territorial control to influence the political process in Tripoli.”¹⁶⁶ Their assessment in this area is one of a far more

¹⁶¹ Carboni and Moody, 462.

¹⁶² Carboni and Moody, 462.

¹⁶³ Carboni and Moody, 465.

¹⁶⁴ Carboni and Moody, 463.

¹⁶⁵ Carboni and Moody, 466.

¹⁶⁶ Carboni and Moody, 471–72.

localized set of objectives and little concern for the remainder of Libya's territory. Groups therefore fragment to realize these more narrowly focused goals and doing so does not equate to higher levels of violence.

An unidentical but still similar story emerges in Cyrenaica where the authors note that there are fewer groups competing for influence there. This means that while there is no shortage of violence, group fragmentation is also minimized. Specifically, they state that "in Benghazi and the wider Cyrenaica region, the conflict environment is characterized by bipolarity with sustained high levels of violence but lower armed group fragmentation."¹⁶⁷ As was the case in Tripolitania, there is no evidence to support the thesis that more groups necessarily equates to higher levels of violence. In both of the above-mentioned areas, violence bears no relationship to the fragmentation of competing groups.

However, Carboni and Moody find that "Libya's South is the only region where a strong positive relationship between the fragmentation of the conflict environment and the escalation of violence patterns exists."¹⁶⁸ This highly tribalized region then fits with the common understanding that more groups further compromise the security situation. Interestingly, however, the authors caveat their findings by noting that "local actors, however, do not seem entirely responsible for this upward shift in violence,"¹⁶⁹ suggesting rather that the porous borders in that area contribute to the dynamic.

The net effect of their research as it pertains to this thesis is that it challenges the notion that each group operating within Libya seeks the same outcome—namely the control of the state apparatus and the territory thereof. It seems evident that each armed group has their own unique objectives and that this understanding necessarily requires an analysis that focuses on the regional or sub-regional (vice national) levels. In this regard, "it is more fruitful to view Libya as a 'mediated state' where the state exists as one of

¹⁶⁷ Carboni and Moody, 473.

¹⁶⁸ Carboni and Moody, 474.

¹⁶⁹ Carboni and Moody, 474.

several socio-political constellations contesting to establish authority.”¹⁷⁰ In Libya, the state is not the centerpiece, and any explanation of the internal factors involved in the civil war’s existence and persistence should take this into account.

There are undoubtedly internal factors present in Libya that directly relate to the civil war’s persistence. Three in particular, however, seem to possess the highest degree of explanatory power. First, the power vacuum created by the removal of Gaddafi’s iron fist and the general proliferation of popular anti-authoritarian movements during the Arab Spring—unquestionably laid the foundation for what was to follow. Additionally, the fragmented nature of the civil war equates to an excess of armed factions all vying for their version of governance—each working at cross purposes without the unity necessary to succeed. Finally, potential and realized oil wealth offers groups an endless stream of revenue to fund not only their activities, but also guarantee the continuance of conflict.

C. EXTERNAL FACTORS

In addition to understanding the nature of the internal factors present in the Libyan civil war, any attempt to explain the conflict’s depth and breadth must account for the nature of third-party involvement. The following section identifies the role the regional, international, and non-state actors play in the current situation. It additionally analyzes the effect of proxy forces as well as trans-national insurgent forces at work inside Libya. This section concludes with an overview of the literature which addresses outside involvement in the cessation of hostilities and the peace (or lack thereof) following conflict.

The analysis of Schumacher and Schraeder cited earlier not only covers indigenous forces, but also spends considerable time exploring exogenous factors. They find that “one of the most striking foreign policy developments associated with the Arab Spring has been the intensification of violence across North Africa by a proliferating number of violent non-state actors. These include insurgent groups, terrorist organizations and foreign

¹⁷⁰ Carboni and Moody, 476.

fighters.”¹⁷¹ Their dataset conclusively shows that terrorist attacks have seen an uptick in Libya since the fall of Gaddafi and that this phenomenon is widespread in the region.

Schumacher and Schraeder find that terrorist attacks “dramatically increased in North Africa, from 102 attacks in 2010 (the year preceding the beginning of the Arab Spring) to a peak of 1,158 terrorist attacks in 2015.”¹⁷² This increase unsurprisingly triggered international intervention followed by more terrorist (especially ISIS) activities and the snowball effect was in full swing. The authors cite a 2017 International Crisis Group (ICG) report that explains how, “in the case of Libya, these initiatives ultimately led in 2016 to a U.S.-supported military operation by Libya’s [Government of National Accord] and militia forces to defeat an expanding ISIS presence that was headquartered in Sirte.”¹⁷³ As in many other areas of the world, once terrorist organizations are involved, the number and variety of actors increase dramatically.

On the topic of ISIS and foreign fighters, a 2016 World News article estimated that “about half of Islamic State fighters in Sirte are considered foreign, according to Western officials monitoring the offensive. The majority are Tunisian but include an array of sub-Saharan nationalities, notably Sudanese and Nigerians.”¹⁷⁴ As was indicated in previous sections of this thesis, the other troubling trend is when Libyans themselves become foreign fighters and return to their homeland to continue the jihad. This is an issue for all involved parties to include the international community. Indeed, “the foreign policy challenge posed by North African foreign fighters does not end when they leave for a foreign conflict. It is magnified when they return home with military training and uncertain intentions.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Schumacher and Schraeder, “The Evolving Impact of Violent Non-State Actors on North African Foreign Policies during the Arab Spring,” 682.

¹⁷² Schumacher and Schraeder, 690.

¹⁷³ Schumacher and Schraeder, 693.

¹⁷⁴ Maria Abi-habib, Hassan Morajea, “World News: Extremist Fighters Regroup in Libya,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2016, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Schumacher and Schraeder, “The Evolving Impact of Violent Non-State Actors on North African Foreign Policies during the Arab Spring,” 696.

Though, for the sake of this factor to be an important aspect in this thesis, it must be shown that foreign fighters and/or foreign involvement influence the duration of hostilities.

In the previously mentioned 2008 study conducted by Patrick Brandt and his colleagues, they noted just such a link and found that “from a policy perspective, the duration of civil wars is one feature that is amenable to influence by external actors.” They go on to specify that, “indeed, the decline in the number of on-going civil wars after 1994 is largely a function of the international community intervening to broker peace settlements to protracted conflicts.”¹⁷⁶ The key distinction is that the above statement pertains to outside actors who become involved in the peace process and *not* in direct intervention. To the latter point, the authors conclude that the opposite usually occurs when external actors become directly involved, claiming flatly that “external intervention has been implicated in extending the duration of civil wars once they are underway.”¹⁷⁷ Their analysis dives deeper into the subject and enlightens readers on how this intervention shapes conflict.

Regarding the question of why outside agencies become involved in the first place and the results, they note that “intervention is more likely to be undertaken to forestall the imminent defeat of a favored party rather than to assure quick victory. This could account for the consistent finding that interventions prolong civil wars.”¹⁷⁸ The study is unique in that it breaks down the different types of factions (government and rebels) and looks at them individually to gain a sense of what types of regimes benefit from outside intervention. Brandt and his colleagues find that “external intervention extends the duration of civil wars that end in government victory” but, conversely that “intervention has no effect on the duration of civil wars that end in rebel victory or negotiated settlement.”¹⁷⁹ Unfortunately, the strength of their final assertion will have to wait until the conflict ends to be fully realized.

¹⁷⁶ Brandt et al., “When and How the Fighting Stops,” 5.

¹⁷⁷ Brandt et al., 5.

¹⁷⁸ Brandt et al., 14.

¹⁷⁹ Brandt et al., 28–29.

In a 2014 study, political scientist Kristin Bakke set out to “explore how transnational insurgents affect a domestic insurgent movement’s strength, which is captured by its capacity to effectively muster coercive force, mobilize supporters, and organize cohesive collective action.”¹⁸⁰ Through examining a range of recent and ongoing conflicts (to include Libya), she concludes, perhaps counterintuitively, that “indeed, it is not a given that transnational insurgents strengthen domestic insurgent movements.”¹⁸¹ How then, do her findings square with other works on the subject?

Bakke is quick to point out that not all indigenous factions want outside support and that the support often comes with strings attached. She states that “although transnational insurgents may strengthen a domestic insurgent movement by contributing resources, fighters, and know-how, they can also weaken the movement by introducing new ideas about what the struggle is about and how it should be fought.”¹⁸² The real damage comes to the movement when these outside ideas are divergent from the original goals of the group. “Indeed, the entry of new ideas can lead directly to movement divisions if the local resistance leaders withhold their support, as well as difficulty for the movement leaders in garnering public backing,”¹⁸³ she insists. This creates a dilemma for the indigenous leadership and makes for course-altering decisions.

The interesting dynamic at work here, however, is not what happens to the outside supporters, but what happens to the group dynamic within the conflict arena. To that end, Bakke posits that “in order to properly understand the impact, one must consider how the influence of transnational insurgents comes to be accepted or resisted by the local population, in turn shaping the movement’s strength.”¹⁸⁴ The important aspect in this relationship is the “local resistance leaders’ willingness and ability to graft or prune these

¹⁸⁰ Kristin M. Bakke, “Help Wanted? The Mixed Record of Foreign Fighters in Domestic Insurgencies,” *International Security* 38, no. 4 (Spring 2014): 152, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/545070>.

¹⁸¹ Bakke, 152.

¹⁸² Bakke, 153.

¹⁸³ Bakke, 153.

¹⁸⁴ Bakke, 153.

ideas to resonate within the local context.”¹⁸⁵ If an agreement between the two organizations cannot be achieved, “the transnational insurgents can inadvertently hurt the domestic movement’s strength by diminishing its ability to garner public support and maintain organizational cohesion.”¹⁸⁶ This analysis could potentially explain the continually shifting alliances seen by outside actors as well as local factions in Libya’s civil war. The dyad between internal and external groups and the dynamism that creates is not the only one to consider in an effort to fully grasp Libya’s civil war. External groups also interface with one another as a group or by themselves and that interaction, too, has an impact on the conflict.

Attempting to “model the interactive role that unilateral interventions play in civil war duration” Political scientists Aysegul Aydin and Patrick M. Regan looked at post-1945 civil wars and compiled an informative data set relevant to Libya which focuses on intervening states and their relationships with one another.¹⁸⁷ The authors broadly frame their study by claiming that “evidence from the latter half of the 20th century points to civil wars as multiparty environments: in almost half of the wars in this period, more than one third-party state intervened in the same conflict, pointing to the interconnected dimensions of external interventions.”¹⁸⁸ Ayden and Regan observe that “unilateral interventions exert a cumulative impact on civil wars depending on interveners’ interrelations” and that “states with a cooperative rapport have an easier time in bringing civil wars to an end though they act unilaterally and follow their interests in the civil war environment, whereas states that compete for influence over war combatants prolong the fighting.”¹⁸⁹ Their classification of these differing intervention types proves particularly helpful in understanding their impact.

¹⁸⁵ Bakke, 153.

¹⁸⁶ Bakke, 185.

¹⁸⁷ Aydin and Regan, “Networks of Third-Party Intervenors and Civil War Duration,” 574.

¹⁸⁸ Aydin and Regan, 576.

¹⁸⁹ Aydin and Regan, 573.

Ayden and Regan categorize third-party interventions into two broad cases: those that balance the war's factions and those that bandwagon on one side or the other. In the former, they conclude that "states supporting opposite sides in a civil war—what we call balancers—aim to offset each other's influence and, in doing so, they spoil the chances for peaceful settlement."¹⁹⁰ In the latter, they note that "bandwagoning generates an earlier termination, but only when intervening parties share similar preferences" and that "bandwagoning interventions have an easier time manipulating combatant behavior since there is a certain degree of agreement in their actions, and we link this favorable impact to close political relations among interveners."¹⁹¹

The authors show that "multiple interveners may attempt to offset each other's influence in the civil war by supporting opposite sides of the conflict and contribute to the willingness of the warring parties to fight for longer periods."¹⁹² Furthermore, "in a civil war where an intervener attempts to offset others' influence, this form of third-party alignment contributes to war duration by 92.9%" because "interveners competing with each other in this environment lead to a stalemate situation between combatants and spoil prospects for peace."¹⁹³ Their most significant finding is that "what matters most is whether interveners are willing to pursue similar solutions to wars and shape combatants' bargaining positions accordingly."¹⁹⁴

Their research also touches on another significant aspect of outside intervention in modern civil wars—the increased use of proxies. Andrew Mumford has written extensively about proxy warfare and notes in a 2013 article found in the *RUSI Journal* that "since the end of the Cold War, superpower-induced proxy wars have largely been replaced by proxy wars driven by regional powers via the cross border percolation of militia groups,

¹⁹⁰ Aydin and Regan, 574.

¹⁹¹ Aydin and Regan, 575.

¹⁹² Aydin and Regan, 579.

¹⁹³ Aydin and Regan, 586.

¹⁹⁴ Aydin and Regan, 586.

witnessed especially in Africa.”¹⁹⁵ He goes on to show that there are factors unique to proxy warfare that make it appealing to the outside actor. Mumford states that “modern-day proxy wars have become arm’s-length ‘effects-based operations’ whereby a specific objective is desired (such as the downfall of an authoritarian regime) without risking foreseen consequences (conflict escalation with a rival superpower, for example) and at an acceptable monetary cost.”¹⁹⁶

These appealing aspects are not unique to just civil wars or to civil wars that involve the use of proxies. According to Mumford, these aspects reflect the changing nature of modern conflict more broadly. He posits that there have been “four major changes in the nature of modern warfare and argues that they point to a potential increase in the engagement of proxy strategies by states.”¹⁹⁷ The first of these four changes are particularly relevant to the situation in Libya and include “the decreased public and political appetite in the West for large-scale counter-insurgency ‘quagmires’ against a backdrop of a global recession” and “the rise in prominence and importance of Private Military Companies (PMCs) to contemporary war-fighting.”¹⁹⁸ Both factors are certainly on display in Libya.

In a separate work, also published in 2013, Mumford further adds to the understanding of proxy wars in his book titled: *Proxy Warfare*. He begins by illuminating the fact that a more encompassing definition of the involved parties is in order. Specifically, he claims that “it must be added that proxy war is not a form of conflict conducted solely by states. It is very important to address the issue of what proxy warfare means in the age of non-state actors and networked terrorism” and goes on to show that “the establishment of global al-Qaeda ‘franchises’ has distinctly affected the mode by which regional conflicts can be influenced.”¹⁹⁹ The effect is exacerbated when these organizations intervene

¹⁹⁵ Mumford, “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict,” 45.

¹⁹⁶ Mumford, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Mumford, 40.

¹⁹⁸ Mumford, 40.

¹⁹⁹ Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 8.

“particularly at the behest or with the cooperation of ‘rogue states’.”²⁰⁰ Mumford’s examination of these phenomena goes on to specifically address the situation in Libya.

His look at why states (and presumably non-state actors as well) become involved in civil wars relies on previous work completed by civil war specialist Frederic Pearson.²⁰¹ Of the six “primary reasons why states intervene in other countries,” three certainly fit Libya’s case, beginning with the protection of economic interests to which Russia’s involvement can undeniably be linked. Next, regional power balances explain the Gulf States’ rationale in providing support for their preferred faction. Finally, ideology perhaps best explains the United States and European involvement as they are undoubtedly concerned about the radical Islamic ideology being allowed to fester in un- and under-governed spaces.²⁰²

Just as there were an array of internal factors capable of explaining Libya’s civil war and its persistence, there are similarly numerous external factors at play that share blame. Among the external factors that best fit Libya are: the exponential proliferation of international terrorist organizations that found Libya fertile ground, the overt misalignment of international organizations and member states (namely the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States), as well as the lure of using proxies to achieve ends on the cheap. The net effect is to take an already extremely challenging internal situation and add outside actors, support, and competing interests that slow any potential for a conclusion to a complete standstill.

D. CONCLUSION

The literature focused on civil wars is robust and serves as a great tool to evaluate the current situation in Libya. Slightly less robust but equally beneficial is the work that focuses on Libya specifically. The combination of these sources paints a vivid picture of

²⁰⁰ Mumford, 8.

²⁰¹ Frederic S. Pearson, “Foreign Military Interventions and Domestic Disputes,” *International Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1974): 259–90, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600156>.

²⁰² Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 31–32.

what is going on inside the arena as well as the multitude of actors operating outside its boundaries. Their motivations, alliances, ideologies, capabilities, and goals are undoubtedly a difficult web and attempts to unspin it is a momentous task. Even still, there are common themes in the literature that can be parsed out and combined to create a reasonable set of explanations as to why the civil war in Libya continues with a very dim light at the end of the tunnel—if any at all.

Internally, Libya suffers from the repercussions of a decades-long totalitarian government that ended at a critical time in Arab and Islamic history. Gaddafi was not only the party responsible for their being no ability to extinguish the flames of Libya's conflagration. His demise during the Arab Spring unleashed a groundswell of anger and retribution from corners of Libya long repressed under his version of Islam. Because of his personality, there was no succession protocol in place and chaos reigned. This lack of control was immediately recognized by neighbors and international organizations and naturally ushered in the vicious intervention of fighters that continues today.

Once the civil war progressed from the muddled form it took directly following Gaddafi's removal to the somewhat more predictable, but nevertheless confused form that endures to present, the internal factions have remained fractionalized with little prospect of consensus. The important aspect in these differences is the end state espoused by each group. Ways and means can differ, but if what Libya should look like when the battle is over is completely different for each group, there can be little hope for compromise. This divergence is especially acute if these groups do not seek a role in governing all or even most of the country. The collective action problem is indeed a difficult hurdle to overcome and one that in Libya may be insurmountable.

The unfortunate reality is that the community outside of Libya is just as culpable in the war's persistence as those within. Perched atop the list of responsible outside actors is undoubtedly the international terror organizations of IS and AQIM. Neither organization is prone to pass up a good opportunity, and the bedlam created after 2011 was just that. Internationally recognized, well-funded, and preaching a message that was welcomed in a post-Gaddafi era, these organizations were perfectly suited to fan the flames. A massive

influx of money, weapons, personnel, and knowledge further divided enemy camps within Libya and altered any possibility of reconciliation.

Equally unfortunate was the response of the international community. Far from being united, groups within the United Nations (and especially members within the Security Council) have yet to come to a consensus on how the war should be concluded. Even the United States has charted different tacks in its approach. The result has been a balancing act that feeds actors with just enough to keep the fight going and not nearly enough to end it. Unless these differences are resolved and a united front dedicated to the cessation of hostilities is realized, there can be no hope for any conclusion. The following chapter will address these shortfalls and explore the literature for any recommendations.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. OVERVIEW

The literature on civil wars, proxy wars, third-party involvement, and conflict in general is immense. The portion of this academic work that is applicable to Libya's current situation is also significant and yields a number of explanations for the war's stubborn persistence as well as possible paths to its resolution. This chapter consists of four sections: The first summarizes the most relevant explanations for the durability of Libya's civil war. The next two sections review both successful and less effective strategies for ending civil wars. A final section explores what the United States might do to assist war termination in Libya.

B. EXPLANATIONS FOR LIBYA'S CIVIL WAR

There was no one single explanation for the persistence of Libya's civil, but rather a combination of historical and contemporary factors interacting both within and outside of its borders. The reign of Gaddafi stands as a clearly observable and undeniable impetus for the current conflict. His policy of total economic, political, religious, and social control shaped Libya in profound ways during his rule. He brought Libya from the end of colonialism, through the Cold War, to the globalized world of the 2000s. Gaddafi's presence was even felt postmortem as the country reacted to his removal in a sporadic and violent manner. It might be argued that Gaddafi's authoritarian presence was a necessary evil in maintaining the unity of an artificial state amalgamated by a colonial power from three previously autonomous regions. However, Libya's regionalism would once again resurface upon Gaddafi's demise. Tribal affiliations (to include their requisite militias), regional factions, and religious groups long oppressed and marginalized by Gaddafi all found their outlet in a post-Arab Spring Libya. The current landscape of the civil war mirrors the pre-statehood version of Libya so that, in the absence of a strong central authority, regional, tribal, and ethnic cleavages persist and flourish.

These groups, however, are only as powerful as the resources at their disposal. To that end, Libya has been blessed—or cursed—with a vast amount of oil that funds the

activities of whatever group controls it. Experience shows that large revenues sources—and especially oil—can prolong civil wars depending on who controls it.²⁰³ In the case of Libya, the fight over oil revenue continues to drive instability. It limits the ability of the internationally recognized government to provide services, funds militias and other non-state actors, and creates an unstable environment for the people who rely on petroleum rents to finance their livelihood.

Oil also serves to draw regional and international actors into Libya's civil war. Atop the list of outside parties responsible for the conflict's continuance are international terrorist organizations. The Islamic State, al Qaeda, and Ansar al-Sharia have all funneled countless dollars, weapons, and personnel into Libya in the hopes of establishing (or expanding) their influence in North Africa. In addition to being a potentially lucrative location, Libya also offers the perfect environment to proselytize their ideology and expand their influence, which has certainly exacerbated an already tumultuous situation.

Finally, intervention by the international community to include the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States, while perhaps well-intentioned, has done much to continue the war and little to curtail it. Their direct involvement has increased the likelihood of extending the war by propping up organizations that might otherwise either quit, align with other groups, or sue for an end to the war. Likewise, the international community's lack of consistency and cooperation has undermined the type of conditions or dialogue necessary for the fighting to stop. As a 2019 Congressional Research Service report notes: "International powers appear to share a desire to avoid the worst effects of continued fighting but also appear to differ on how to defuse the situation and whether or how to hold actors accountable."²⁰⁴ It is this aspect of the conflict that warrants further exploration as paradoxically intervention by the international community seems both the only possible avenue to a resolution as well as a significant roadblock.

²⁰³ Carboni and Moody, "Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War."

²⁰⁴ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Libya: Conflict Disrupts U.S.-Backed Transition Plan," *Congressional Research Service*, Library of Congress, June 26, 2019, 1, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11091>.

C. WHAT NOT TO DO

David E. Cunningham's study of third-party intervention and its effect on conflict resolution explores both how and why intervention occurs and assesses the net effect. The first important consideration to account for is why external actors become involved in the first place. To that end, Cunningham states that, "in particular, existing approaches to external intervention can be divided into two schools: those that focus on the ability of parties to negotiate, and those that focus on the capability of combatants to wage military warfare."²⁰⁵ Outside actors involved in Libya have tried a mix of both. Though negotiation appears to be the most desirable strategy on its face, there is difficulty in assessing stated intent and actual impact. The problem arises when the external group's goals and methods do not align to those of their clients. Cunningham notes that often, "external states become involved in civil war to pursue an agenda which is separate from the goals of the internal combatants" and that this causes an extension of the conflict for two reasons: this mismatch of agendas "introduces another actor that must approve any settlement to end the war." And second, as a result, the "external states generally have less incentive to negotiate than internal actors because they bear lower costs of fighting and they can anticipate gaining less benefit from negotiation than domestic insurgents."²⁰⁶

This phenomenon is readily apparent in the Libyan context. As the most recent Congressional Research Service article written by Christopher Blanchard notes, "no diplomatic solution is foreseeable while three of the permanent members of the UN Security Council—France, Russia and the United States—support Haftar while the UK supports the GNA."²⁰⁷ The report goes on to conclude that "this division has stripped UNSMIL [United Nations Support Mission In Libya] of the diplomatic heft required to persuade Libya's factions to accept a mediated settlement."²⁰⁸ It seems that the

²⁰⁵ Cunningham, "Blocking Resolution," 116.

²⁰⁶ Cunningham, 115.

²⁰⁷ Christopher M. Blanchard, "Libya: Conflict Disrupts U.S.-Backed Transition Plan," 3.

²⁰⁸ Blanchard, 3.

international community most capable of bringing a solution to the conflict is itself conflicted on just how to accomplish such a task.

This is not to suggest that solutions have not been introduced. Indeed, it was international involvement that empowered “[Prime Minister] Serraj...to form a government of national accord (GNA)” with “his smooth arrival in Tripoli” initially appearing “to herald a brighter future” according to *The Economist*.²⁰⁹ However, it would not be long before the usefulness of that agreement was thrown into doubt. Jacob Mundy concludes that “by late 2016, it was clear that the Skhirat Agreement had not so much engendered a single national administration as it had simply added a veneer of international legitimacy to the same Misratan- and Silamsit-dominated political-military coalitions that had purged the newly elected House from Tripoli in 2014.”²¹⁰ Similarly, even *The Economist* article concludes that for all the hope surrounding the agreement, “It has not turned out that way.”²¹¹ Even though efforts have been made, the results have been far less than what is required to end the conflict.

Outside patrons looking to prop up their particular local agent for a military success also contributes to the conflict’s continuation. External intervention in this form simply results in more battles and more death, because external actors continue to support their client even when the indigenous groups are failing militarily. This is because, as Cunningham notes, that the rules of sunk costs apply: “the number of battle-deaths is significant...but in the opposite direction than expected—conflicts are less likely to end when they have more battle-deaths.”²¹² Unfortunately a high death toll does not equate to an indication that international donors should stop their funding and support.

The provisioning of forces inside Libya by outside entities is clearly having a negative outcome and directly leading to the war’s continuance. Christopher Blanchard

²⁰⁹ *The Economist* “The Unravelling; Libya,” (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit N.A., Incorporated, November 26, 2016), 1, 1844365670, ProQuest Central.

²¹⁰ Mundy, *Libya*, 203–4.

²¹¹ “The Unravelling; Libya,” 1.

²¹² Cunningham, “Blocking Resolution,” 122.

notes that “outside powers have helped sustain Libya’s civil war since its beginning, but recent events have raised the prospect of more direct military intervention” and that “such intervention will become more likely if Ankara believes it the only option to prevent the defeat of Libya Dawn and the GNA, and similarly if Abu Dhabi and Cairo consider it necessary to prevent Haftar’s defeat.”²¹³ So if external actor involvement leads to a continuation of the war, what can be done? In what ways should the international community become involved?

D. WHAT HAS WORKED

While it may not be possible to align the interests of all involved parties or force particular outside actors to cease their involvement altogether, a possible track might include an exclusively diplomatic approach. A group of prominent political scientists led by Regan, Aydin, and Richard Frank, set out to collate “information on 438 diplomatic interventions in 68 of the 153 conflicts from 1945 to 1999” to assess the impact of “diplomacy (with third-party mediation being the most common form)” on the management of civil wars. The results of their findings indicated that there is a significant benefit to outside involvement so long as it is done in a particular manner. “If we consider full or partial settlements as successful outcomes, mediations were coded as ending successfully in 133 out of 352 cases (38%). Over 57% of mediations result in a ceasefire, and only 4% fail completely.”²¹⁴

Their findings indicate a significant difference between intervention and involvement, especially when that involvement is exclusively diplomatic. They conclude that “nearly all mediation attempts result in an observable change in behavior between combatants, even if the negotiated outcome is only short-lived.”²¹⁵ It seems that there is

²¹³ Christopher M. Blanchard, “Libya: Conflict Disrupts U.S.-Backed Transition Plan,” 3.

²¹⁴ Regan, Frank, and Aydin, “Diplomatic Interventions and Civil War,” 140.

²¹⁵ Patrick M. Regan, Richard W. Frank, and Aysegul Aydin, “Diplomatic Interventions and Civil War: A New Dataset,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 1 (January 2009): 135, 140-41 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343308098408>.

not much to lose in pursuing a diplomatic solution. So why, then, do outside actors continue to follow a militarized strategy that has been proven unsuccessful? And what approaches has the United States deployed in its efforts to end Libya's civil war?

E. UNITED STATES INVOLVEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States has had shown a vested interest in the future of Libya since its involvement in the counter-Gaddafi military efforts in 2011—dubbed Operation ODYSSEY DAWN. In the so called “Pottery Barn” concept allegedly articulated by former Secretary of State Colin Powell in 2002, the United States had a hand in breaking Libya, and therefore “owned” it. Additionally, the United States has long held a position in international diplomatic efforts to bring about the end of hostilities—be it in its role as a United Nations Security Council member or in a unilateral capacity. Given this unique position, the United States stands as a viable institution to assist in the peaceful conclusion of Libya's civil war. But just what should the United States be doing towards this end? The answers to this question are coincidentally quite easy to find and have already been briefed to numerous members of the U.S. government.

In May 2019, experts from across the political and security sectors briefed the House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism on their recommendations for how the United States should move forward. Benjamin Fishman from The Washington Institute for Near East Policy states that, “first and foremost, the White House needs to establish a clear policy toward Libya. Is it in favor of Haftar, or does it support an immediate cease-fire and a return to U.N.-led negotiations? Either way, it must express a clear set of preferences.”²¹⁶ He offered three specific recommendations for the United States: “the first priority should be halting the violence” and that, “the U.S. should lead an effort to impose an unconditional cease-fire at the U.N. Security Council.”²¹⁷ His second recommendation is that “the U.S. needs to conduct a serious effort to end outside support to Libya's warring factions, the introduction

²¹⁶ H.R., *The Conflict in Libya*, 25.

²¹⁷ H.R., *The Conflict in Libya*, 25.

of new weapons and technologies, such as strike-capable Chinese-made drones on Haftar's side, not only threatens continued escalation and civilian casualties but clearly violates the U.N. arms embargo." Fishman concluded by claiming that "the U.S. has to be at the table represented by senior officials when the negotiating process resumes. A more intense level of U.S. engagement on Libya is necessary if the U.N. will be able to reconstitute its peace and unity efforts."²¹⁸ His prescriptions are echoed in other congressional briefs.

The chairman of the House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism, Congressman Theodore E. Deutch recognized the importance of unity with international partners, a clearly defined policy, and a cessation of support to the warring factions. "Moving forward, it is imperative that the administration articulate a clear U.S. policy in Libya," Deutch stated. "The United States must convince outside powers to end their military support to the warring parties." He went on to urge that "the United States should also support an immediate cease-fire, reiterate its commitment to political reconciliation, and unequivocally reject any military solution to the Libyan conflict" and that "only a political process can secure U.S. interests, stabilize Libya, reduce the threat of terrorism, and most importantly, provide peace and opportunity to the Libyan people."²¹⁹

Frederic Wehrey, a Middle East analyst and former U.S. Air Force officer assigned to Libya, recommended a similar approach during his testimony. He began by claiming that "even modest U.S. diplomacy could prevent the country from spiraling into greater conflict" and "in particular, the U.S. should focus on three core areas." His first recommendation is that, "the United States should exert diplomatic leverage to dissuade regional meddlers from sending arms and materiel to both sides." Next, "American diplomacy should safeguard Libya's vital oil infrastructure and prevent it from being militarized, especially by Haftar's side." And "finally, the U.S. should use the threat of

²¹⁸ H.R., *The Conflict in Libya*, 25–26.

²¹⁹ H.R., *The Conflict in Libya*, 3.

sanctions and war crimes prosecution against all sides to deter attacks on civilians, medical workers, and critical infrastructure, and to marginalize spoilers.”²²⁰

The common thread in their recommendations is unambiguous: The United States needs to establish an unwavering policy and lead a diplomatic effort to bring about an end to the war. Mr. Jonathan Winer, the State Department’s Special Envoy for Libya, stated that, “we see no military solution to Libya’s political divisions; sustainable security solutions require sustainable political solutions.”²²¹ It should be noted that this statement was offered to the U.S. Congress in November of 2016. Three years later, these themes would again be iterated in the hopes that they may resonate more clearly or be adhered to more closely.

What should be avoided is also alarmingly obvious. The continual arming and funding of factions within Libya, the lack of an international consensus, and the oscillating foreign policy positions have contributed to the current deadlock. The results have been disastrous and they are not moving in a positive direction. “Between 1 January and 31 March 2020, UNSMIL documented at least 131 civilian casualties (64 deaths and 67 injuries). This figure represents an overall increase in civilian casualties of 45 per cent compared to the preceding period in the fourth quarter of 2019 with a 113 per cent increase in deaths and an 11 per cent increase in injuries”²²² according to a UNSMIL report. While the above figures cannot be solely attributed to the absence of a coherent U.S. or international strategy, the lack thereof has not helped matters. Unless something is done, in a situation where no local actor backed by an international sponsor is poised to win, the prognosis for Libya’s future must continue to be bleak.

²²⁰ H.R., *The Conflict in Libya*, 6–7.

²²¹ H.R., *Libya: Five Years After Ghadafi*, 5.

²²² United Nations Support Mission in Libya, “Civilian Casualties Report 1 January- 31 March 2020,” April 30, 2020, 1, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/documents>.

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