## **QI Panel:**

## **Libya: Prospects for Stability**

## August 28, 202312-1 PM EDT

**Steven Simon 00:58**

Hello, my name is Steven Simon. I'm a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft. And I've assembled today a distinguished panel to explore issues related to affairs in Libya. The panelists whose biographies appear on the website and on our website, and then the flyer that was distributed to, to those who registered are all themselves quite accomplished scholars who specialize in Libya, and who got a lot of experience to share on Libya related issues, at least the ones that we're going to raise today in our discussion. Mary Fitzgerald, as her tag indicates, as a non resident scholar at the Middle East Institute, and she has focused a great deal on Libya and worked for very prominent think tanks, including the International Crisis Group. And Emad is a non resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council, and he specializes in a range of security issues. But in regional terms, he has worked a great deal on Libya and been on the ground investigating developments there. Ben Fishman is also a scholar of Libya, but he differs from our from our other two panelists, and that he has had experience in the US government working on Libya policy dating back to the revolt in Libya in 2011, and will seek to tap some of his historical insights. Now, I've got two broad objectives for this session. One is to bring bring us all up to date, really on the situation in Libya. And the other is to explore what honest broker outside powers, particularly the United States, can usefully do to improve the situation for Libyans. In general, as, as we're all probably aware, Libya has experienced some serious difficulties before and after the revolution in in 2011, and it now has a divided government and in a very contested and violent political space. So we, we are interested in what the prospects are against that background for stability in Libya. Looking forward this is not just a concern, of course, for us, policymakers, and, and voters, but but also for European and regional players, as well. What I'd like to do is well, just let me explain that I would like our panelists, to speak for a total of about 30 minutes so that we have a half an hour for audience Q and A. Okay, having said all that, I'd like to start with Ben Fishman, who was in a sense present at the creation. He was at the White House when the Arab Spring broke out, and he worked. He concentrated on events in Libya during that during that period, so for Ben, you know, I'd like to ask, from his perspective, and from your perspective, how did we get to this situation Now, what happened in 2011? And what happened to the grand plans for Libya's reconstitution following Qaddafi's defeat. Barack Obama famously said that, you know, the Libya intervention in in those years was a quote unquote, shit show. What? Why did he say that? What went, what went wrong? But also what went right? If if anything?

**Ben Fishman 05:33**

Thanks, Steve. And my friends and colleagues are joining us, Mary and Emad who can add more insight than I can on the internal situation in Libya and some European perspectives as well as global current global crisis on handling the situation in Libya. Since you asked, I'll go back briefly to 2011 and try to address two or three debates that still go on at this time to sort of set the context of the current situation. One, was it a regime change operation from the beginning? It may have been for sarcosine. But I can say definitively for the Obama administration. It was not. We hoped that Qaddafi would, or members of the regime wouldn't negotiate a dignified departure, or some kind of departure with elements of the NCC that send us no government, transitional representatives of the opposition at the time, many of whom had served in the merge team as from minded individuals. Unfortunately, that didn't transpire Qaddafi rejected all kinds of initiatives to outreach. He would famously wouldn't see even the Russians even a you, even the UN representatives. We changed approach, basically, in June, the revolution has started in February. NATO took over operations in April. So there was good two months of still a diplomatic outreach for solutions. It became clear that Qaddafi wasn't interested. and I are, I argue and have argued, in writing, that he himself changed it into a regime change operation. The second issue or debate is wasn't Is it the operation necessary? Or variation of that is, was? Was it worth it for Libyans today? Was life better under Qaddafi, and then it is in the chaotic experience today? We viewed it at a time and I still believe that it was necessary, and to go to support the NATO operations and conceive of a PA policy, what was called by the UN and NATO virgin population of protection mission. And that basically, ended the Qaddafi regime in April, September and October of 2011. Was it necessary because he, his threats to the population is so were so intense, and so and he had a history of violence? Absolutely. That was part of our judgment. And including a threat to Benghazi, and the whole population of three quarters of a million people. And then this question about, what if we hadn't done it? Well, it would most likely have been become a situation like Syria is today, where if we had done nothing, the most prospects, the best prospects would be for a long term insurgency and the level of desirable violence that you see in Syria today. So in my mind, I still think it was necessary. I think so I think it was worth it. And I just, and then I don't live in Libya, I can't compare to the situation today and yesterday, or 2011. But undoubtedly the level of violence, the level of fear the level of has, has been improved. With the level of dictatorship that has gone. Obviously, Libya has been experienced more multiple civil wars, violence, repression. Fear of the increasing civil society cracked down. But life there, I feel certain that it's better today than it is better. That was under this 40 plus year dictatorship. I want to shift a little bit to what the US role is, and where we are today a little bit and let my colleagues fill in more. This is broad brush, brush strokes. I used to have a slide keeping track of Libyan interim PMS, I stopped counting. Because at one point, there were three that claimed the prime ministership and there have been several, and some recognized by the UN some recognized by an Eastern government that claims legitimacy. But more importantly, from the UN side, there have been seven plus the UN special representatives having the UN Mission in, in Libya. And that doesn't include the interim, Libyan over the interim head of the mission, who is probably the most effective and set up the process for elections in 2020 21. That unfortunately, didn't occur for many reasons. But she at least brought the parties together in a serious way. So seven plus in 12 years, is just indicates the level of international division over Libya and lack of focus on on the problems at hand. And you can talk about specifically what those are. For in the US, it's never been our top priority, even when, in 2011, but we were actually actively bombing Libya. And then we turned it over to a support mission. Other issues, just in the Middle East were far more not far more but had prominence. Iran was actively we were in actively negotiations and putting a sanction regime on it, Iraq which still had 1000s of troops, Israel and Palestine always pop up as a crisis to the day. And of course, it was happening in the context of the overall Arab Spring in Egypt and things like that. I've always argued that the US should pay more attention to Libya and being more active and diplomacy, not necessarily to bridge the gap between the Libyan parties themselves. But to bridge the gap between the international actors. Currently, Turkey and Egypt have a bigger role to play. Mary or others can expand on that, because obviously, we're running out of time. So I'd always advocate for a more engaged role for the US. But it's it always competes on with other bilateral issues on the agenda. We rely on Egypt, for example, for calming the situation in with Hamas acting up, we rely on Turkey now for a lot of the grain, Black Sea issues and Ukraine. Not to say that we can do more than one thing at a time. But we, as the United States, we should be able to warn one more than one thing at a time. And I want to make one observation finally on Libya situation And this gets back to the mistakes sort of hypothetical things that we could do better. Then we made the false assumption that because the a lot of them would be in transitional authorities were living Americans, they could fix Libya, or they can operate in a protective context. That was totally wrong. And they, they failed in everything. Now we have the opposite situation where the interim authorities are Libyan Libyans and know how to manipulate the money situation and know how to have inherited Qaddafi is bureaucracy. And we can go on in basically, we have a very corrupt situation where the oil wealth is distributed effectively, to do some things for the population, but most things for the weak. So I'll stop there. Sorry to go on.

**Steven Simon 16:05**

No, you were bang on the money there a 1010 Minute. So so then your bottom line, then is that Libya is better off for the intervention that took place in in 2011. And that the international community is now effectively engaged in that the US had made a really one big mistake as far as you can recall. And that was relying on expats, something that the United States that tends to do with did so in Iraq, and elsewhere. So okay,

**Ben Fishman 16:46**

There were others, but we can go on and discuss that later.

**Steven Simon 16:51**

You mean, after the panel? Just kidding.

**Ben Fishman 16:56**

One of the technical sides that we should, and I'm going to set him up for this is we didn't work as as, as efficiently enough or effectively enough, at the beginning, on security sector reform. We took a pass on that. And the the efforts we made were, in part political reasons and other reasons. were ineffective. And it wasn't just a US problem, but the Western interested parties.

**Steven Simon 17:38**

Got it. Thank you. Mary, I'd like to segue to you. You know, the United States in the in the period in the interwar period, had a very elaborate planning process, as you probably are aware. And it was a multilateral planning process that involved Oh, probably 100 people from various regional states, multilateral organizations, and of course, from within the US government. And this process yielded a massive post war plan for the recovery and stabilization of Libya, in the in the post conflict phase. And, and as far as I could tell, it was never carried out. So, I mean, Ben might have some observations on that for later on in the panel, but the but for you, who followed the the reconstitution of the Libyan state, or the partial reconstitution of it for a long time now, I was wondering what you thought of the international role. Why did it seem to be so ineffective? Why, why was the plan that had been worked on so assiduously simply you know, dropped, dropped from the radar and how would you assess in particular the role of multilateral institutions particularly the UN, which has taken on such a prominent role in the in the formation or attempted reformatting of of Libyan governance.

**Mary Fitzgerald 19:46**

Thank you very much, Stephen. It's a pleasure to be here. Well, I would start first of all with the history of the UN mission in Libya, it was established 12 years ago now And the clue is in the name on smell the UN support mission for Libya. So it's a support mission that is a light footprint mission. And I remember being on the ground in those early stages, after Gaddafi had been overthrown, the lot of conversations with with Libyans about the kind of nature level of international engagement that Libyans wanted at that point. And most Libyans were adamant at that point that they wanted a light footprint, UN mission, Libyans would insist that they could do this alone, they would need assistance for certain things. But what they were adamant about was that they did not need or want a peacekeeping mission. Now, at that point, the Libyan kind of ideas in terms of how they would address the fact that the country was then awash with weaponry as a result of the uprising. Not so many solutions being put forward at that point. Now, we're 12 years on and there are some Libyans who in hindsight, say that actually, they were mistaken that what was needed at that early stage was a more robust UN mission with a more robust mandate that would allow the UN at a very early stage to step into those conversations in terms of what would have happened to the fact that the country was awash with with weapons. So it's interesting in terms of how Libyans Look at, look at it differently now from this particular vantage point. So on SMIL, the UN mission has basically been really kind of limited in terms of what it can do. It's, it can be a facilitator of political dialogues, it can advocate for on human rights issues, it can advocate on record national reconciliation initiatives, etc. But it's it's working within a very limited space. And Ben mentioned earlier, the very high turnover, we've we've had a view and envoys to Libya, it's been quite extraordinary. I think it's also fair to add that the UN mission has over the last 12 years been beset by scandals, and and resignations that have also damaged the image of the UN, internally in Libya. And what we've seen in recent years is building frustrations amongst Libyans regarding the UN's role in Libya. Some Libyans will call for the UN mission to be dissolved entirely. Others will call for its mandate to be revised more robust mandate, etc. But the UN, the UN mission in Libya is also at the mercy of of a divided Security Council. You know, the fact that you have major disagreements at the Security Council regarding the way forward in Libya, you have had security council members supporting key spoilers in the Libyan civil conflict. So that has really hampered the UN's ability to actually do something on the ground. Also, because the UN mission doesn't have the the diplomatic, political and of course military heft to really pressure armed actors in Libya, and also, very importantly, hold external actors accountable, because the Libyan civil conflict has also been a conflict of external actors. So S M we've seen you know, Libya really reminds us of the weakness of the UN sanctions sanctions regime and the difficulties in enforcing that sanctions regime. Libya has been under a UN arms embargo since 2011. But since the country tipped into civil conflict in 2014, we've seen very flagrant violations of the arms embargo by countries. Nope. Most notably the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan to a degree as well. And really, there's been no center for those those countries and those external actors that have been stirring the pot. So also, I would add that, because going back to your initial comments about how, you know, Obama, the Obama administration treated the intervention, first of all, but also the the aftermath and the follow up. And as Obama has made clear in several interviews, he and his administration expected that basically the Europeans would would pick up the con after the ousting of Gaddafi after the military intervention had had ended. And that proved not to be the case. The Euro Europe has, has suffered from a disunity on the on the Libya file, and certainly since 2014, I would argue in many ways, even before that, from 2014 on, we saw a divergence between France and Italy in particular Keilor were France, supportive Khalifa Haftar, the commander based in eastern Libya, who was mounting military operations and nurturing his own political ambitions to be military ruler of Libya, France supported him politically, diplomatically, etc. And ultimately empowered him to become one of the key spoilers of of the Libyan process. And Italy has tried to kind of play a more balanced game, if you like, though its detractors, its critics in Libya have accused of leaning towards the kind of Tripoli based factions over the years. And of course, they've taken on different colors. So really, the Libya file has suffered in the European context from that disunity. And while Paris and Rome have insisted more recently that they have converged more on the Libya file, I think that it has left this kind of residual sense inside Libya amongst Libyans, that they're still kind of at odds with each other when it comes to the Libya file. So that hasn't, that hasn't helped either.

**Steven Simon 26:13**

I asked you why the French are so attracted to Haftar. What? What's in it for them?

**Mary Fitzgerald 26:24**

Well, the French like some of hunters, other allies, as saw him, initially as a as a figure who in eastern Libya could deal with an extremist presence that then existed in in eastern Libya, indeed, French Special Forces were in Benghazi, fighting alongside or working alongside Hafthor US forces during that particular war. And also, they power overHaftar. They believed his narrative that he was building an army. When you know, back in Libya, very much opinions are very much divided over, you know, Haftar supporters will insist he has an army, his opponents and detractors will say what he has is a collection of armed groups or religious claiming to be an army. But Paris very much kind of bought into into that narrative. And in in 2019, when the UN process as it was at that point, leading up to a national conference, which is supposed to kind of move the country towards reconciliation, ultimately, elections. A week before that national conference was due to convene a Haftar launched an offensive to trip to capture Tripoli, from the then internationally recognized government that lasted over a year, it drew turkey into the war intervening on the part of that government in Tripoli, intervening rather in support of the government in Tripoli. It brought Russia in, in a more muscular way than it had been before that, in support of Haftar. And the French, it has to be set in the early stages of that war very much appeared ambivalent on that. I know that in Europe, those who felt it was necessary to have a strong unified position against this war and to, to basically make it clear to S M have her that, that people were very much opposed to this war. The French were more ambivalent. And I think that that was because the French, basically wanted to see if if Haftar ultimately could pull it off, which he could not. He humiliatingly had to retreat from from from Tripoli and 2020. So that kind of gives a sense in terms of the different external actors, the different external metallers that have made the Libyan political power struggles, if you like, that have power to the civil conflict that lasted from 2014 to 2020. All of those external actors have very much complicated, not just the power struggles, the civil conflict, but also the ways of getting out of that.

**Steven Simon 29:11**

Thank you very much, Mary. for that. I'd like to turn now to Emad. And Emad, I was I was hoping you do a couple of things, in addition to whatever you'd like to to share with us. In your intervention. I was hoping in the first place, you would drill down a little deeper into the evolution of the security situation in Libya, since since the intervention and and offer your view as to why things evolved in the way that they did. And also to discuss really building on what Mary was, was laying out there. In turn terms of foreign power intervention in Libya a little bit more those dynamics, the Gulf, Turkey, Russia, and so on and how they've affected the military balance within within Libya. And And lastly, since you will be segwaying, from your intervention to q&a, just in a sentence or two, how do you view prospects for stability down the road in Libya? Over to you?

**Emaddedin Badi 30:34**

Thanks, Steven, not sure I'll be able to rise up to the task in 10 minutes, but I'll do my best. So to kind of paint paint a picture of what happened since 2011 onwards in the in the security sector, I would kind of break it down in sort of four phases to simplify the non non specialist audiences. If there are any Libya feels that the audience we can talk more in the in the q&a. But I think the first phase is one of the sort of periods of entitlement opportunism. And there's a sort of lack of closure in the immediate kind of post post Revolutionary era. So this is the 2011 2012 era. There's a phase where the armed groups are capitalizing on petty political jockeying, so domestic and international, in this case, competition, and essentially cutting out the middleman, which in this case, is the politician. There's a phase particularly after the kind of second Civil War of 2014, where the armed groups are taking advantage of popular disillusionment, and also taking advantage of sort of the decline in legitimacy of political institutions, which, which by then are sort of bifurcated anyway, and are penetrating the state. And the third and latest phase, which we've seen tonight, kind of particularly after the third Civil War of 2019 is one of state capture where and a lot, and we're seeing a lot of return to sort of get def era tactics, both in semantics of what the, what the groups now call themselves, but also in the ways they operate. But to go a little bit into more detail. What I mean by this period of entitlement essentially and lack of closure is that the NATO intervention had this had might have had a sort of specific goal, but the armed groups themselves that mobilize mobilize on a very much on a local basis, and they were endowed with a sort of sense of entitlement entitlement after overthrowing Gaddafi. And bear in mind get Duffy only died at a later stage after the liberation of Tripoli and the recognition international recognition of the of the NDC. So there was always this military ethos in the country that that persisted and lingered until after 2011. And for a lot of individuals, the revolution wasn't really done. Until X goal was achieved. At first it was taking over this area, then it was taking over Tripoli, then it was killing Gaddafi. S E And then after that, for some it was about marginalizing opponents. And to this very day, you still see people claiming that the revolution is unfinished. So this sort of military ethos lingered lingers on. But back then this was very much the defining kind of feature in the security sector, in the security sector, and because of the offhand approach that Europeans, Americans, etc, adopted, that meant that the Libyan sort of politicians had to sort of deal with this issue. And what they decided to do unfortunately, in that fateful decision was to deputize the these armed groups to provide them security. So essentially, state fund them, bankrolled them, and give them legitimacy recognize the rebels as the official security institution. And this is part of the part of the reason why we are where we are today. And this was sort of concomitant also with the rise of what I would call rogue militias, particularly formed by young Libyans that didn't necessarily fight in the revolution, but saw in the aftermath, an opportunity for enrichment either by way of doing or then actually getting a salary etc. So you have this massive ballooning security sector by 2012, which marks sort of the advent of security pluralism in the in the country as such. Now, the next phase was more defined by political infighting, particularly within a then kind of burgeoning democratic transition with the General National Congress in the country from 2013 14 and different blocks within it that had competing visions is what I would call them for how the country should be governed. This had ramifications on the security sector both because of ideology but also opportunism it economic incentives etc, tribal, geographic ethnic divides all all of these affected things. But the fact of the matter is, a lot of the groups began maneuvering to secure essentially their own sources of income either through the state or outside of the state control. And the conversely in the in the sort of executive back then there were competing integration processes. So, and in many cases, this was often pitting sort of Gaddafi Aerostructures are revolutionary structures against one another, and allowing a lot of these sort of, divides to to fester. And this culminated with the kind of combination of political divides and security tensions culminated in the second Civil War of 2014, which is the first kind of for many is recognized as the first Civil War because it's not, it's widely not recognized as a as a revolution. 2014 we can tackle it maybe a little bit more later that that the dynamics there in, but I think it marked a little bit, a new modus operandi for a lot of groups. So this is when Haftar, as Mary pointed out, started broadcasting the narrative of an army and return to sort of a sort of organized arm structure for a lot of Western armed groups, this was sort of viewed as as a threat, return to Gaddafi era tactics, etc. But the, what this manifesto does, essentially is an institutional schism between Western structures and Eastern structures, a schism to the to this date versus, but the armed groups essentially leveraged the decline of the different political institutions legitimacy and their own de facto power on the ground to cut out the middleman, in this case, so make their own their own fortunes, blackmail, blackmail, the state or blackmail politicians, and in many cases actually penetrate the state. So you see here that they are beginning to actually place their own, on some cases, relatives or their own networks within state institutions. So capitalizing on on that mid level management layer of governance and display that a lot in municipalities as well. So local governance structures, the latest phase after 2019 is essentially the culmination of this trend of state penetration, which is state capture. And I think it partly is a reflection of everything the panelists mentioned on blunders and the UN processes, lack of focus on security sector reform efforts, really hands off position by the Americans, the Europeans, not a lot of interest in the fall. And this allowed a lot of the armed groups to see these kind of matters in their own hands, because now you have consolidation of the groups that emerge victorious out of the different conflicts, the ones with better access to state funding, better networks, or, in some cases, better access to foreign powers, whether it be Turkey, Russia, or other or other stakeholders. And this state capture, I think, has a lot of implications for the future of the country. Because we kind of tend to forget that from 2011 to 2023, you kind of have 12 years. And in a 12 year time span, the armed groups have not only grown more politically savvy and more financially influential, but they also grown in, in size and in networks, and then the number of recruits that they have, and Libya as a young country, and a lot of young people now are enrolled into these armed groups. So the the implications for the next kind of 1020 years are pretty significant if you look at it just from a demographic standpoint, but essentially what we have now is the rise of politically competitive militias in different geo into different geographies of Libya. In some cases, the consolidation processes are more advanced than others, I'd say the most advanced is probably in eastern Libya, where Haftar has been at it for quite a period now. And it's not handing the sort of reins to or like trying at least handing the reins to to one of his sons. Whereas in western Libya, in some theaters, this is still in more primitive, primitive, primitive theaters where for instance, the city of Zambia is in less advanced phases of this, of this consolidation process where you have a lot of different armed groups and the capital Tripoli is a little bit in between In all of these because back, if you if you go five years back there were pretty significant a dozen almost armed groups in the capital. Now we only talk about four or five, two of which are kind of the most influential ones. So clearly you're seeing a consolidation process. And at some point, these these will probably culminate, if we move to if we look at it from a political transition perspective, these are these aren't groups are likely to become the main custodians of the political process. The way forward. So yeah, I'll leave it at that. And maybe we can tack on more q&a.

**Steven Simon 40:39**

Emad, that was that was terrific. It's, it's spurred a lot of questions. I mean, in my own mind, about the nature of hybrid armies, and, and, and the role and post conflict environments have been working, you know, when Iraq in this respect, and there's some similarities that are interesting. And would be great to follow up on. But let's segue to q&a. And let me pick up with Barbara Slaven, who's asked a question that actually tags quite nicely to something that you just mentioned about, which is this what role if any, might say fill a slum, Qaddafi play in Libya's future? I invite comments from all the panelists on this on this question.

**Mary Fitzgerald 41:35**

I'm, I'm happy to take that up. Well, what we do know because he registered as a candidate to run in the presidential elections that were planned for December 2021. We know he would like or at least at that point he wanted to be president. So we we know that much about his ambitions have those ambitions changed in the last two years remains to be seen. But I think actually what's what's useful is to widen the conversation beyond Saiful, Islam Gadhafi, who is a figure that outside Libya, people tend to project a lot onto because he is the most recognizable figure of the the former regime for for outsiders. And I think the question of what's happening with what some people refer to as the green current green being a way to refer to those who were either part of the former regime served in senior positions, supporters sympathizers, etc. And what we've seen happen with this current though even describing it as a current is perhaps inaccurate, because it is not in any way cohesive or United. It's quite kind of fractious, including factions that are pro Saiful, Islam and anti even though they're all kind of supportive of the former regime. And that's how they are more and more part of the machinery of the state in Libya now, whether in in Tripoli, including holding some ministerial portfolios, but also in the security apparatus, both in western Libya and also under NAFTA and eastern Libya. What's also interesting about the the greens is that they are starting to organize politically beyond this idea of Saiful Islam wanting to be president. There are some 70 political parties that have been registered in Libya in the last two years. And after that 70 Over a dozen could S M be described as green or green tinge, which is fascinating given that, you know, these are people who belong to a regime that was opposed to democratic politics, and they're now beginning to organize for future elections. So I think it's a really interesting question to think about, what a Libya where the greens are part of more and more part of the machinery of the state but also run for elections parliamentary and presidential, what that Libya will look like. And of course, the ultimate question and it was the case in late 2021 was if Saiful Islam was run in elections and those elections happened, how many people would would vote for him? And that's a question that still very much remains open.

**Steven Simon 44:26**

That's That's fascinating. Would you regard the process of of, I guess, well, you were describing what Emad was referring to is state penetration and state capture is is is this a good thing in the long run or a bad thing for Libya?

**Mary Fitzgerald 44:52**

Is that question directed to me or email?

**Steven Simon 44:56**

Yes, yes, Mary. Sorry, I I should have said that.

**Mary Fitzgerald 45:00**

Well, you know, I, when you discuss this with with Libyans, there are those of course who personally benefit from, from this, the system that has not just kind of been created, evolved, and now in many ways has calcified inside Libya, those who benefit from that, of course, would like that to continue those who do not and feel very much excluded from that, of course, want that to change and are increasingly frustrated because they see the window where that could be changed, shutting up ever, ever more by the day. And you know, I think another important note here is back in 2021. Those elections that were planned for December that year, what was really interesting in the run up to the that election was the fact that over 2.5 million Libyans and about 80% of registered voters in a population, a national population of about six and a half million, over two and a half million not just registered, but collected their voting cards in the weeks running up to those planned elections, which was really such a symbolic way of showing that Libyans basically want to change are still wedded to a democratic process, if it means getting rid of the politicians they've been looking at for the last decade. And I think that that's something that really is important to remember in terms of that intention and the wishes of that number of of Libyans.

**Steven Simon 46:36**

Thank you. We've got a couple of questions here that I'd like to cover in our remaining 10 minutes or so. One of them is, I think, for Emad. And it just requires really a short answer, I think, because the second question will require longer answers. And that question is this. How S M S M S think, because the second question will require longer answers. And that question is this. How does the recent loss of the founder and senior leadership of the Wagner group changed their posture in Libya? You want to take a shot at that amount?

**Emaddedin Badi 47:16**

Yeah, you want to give me the second question, or is that unrelated?

**Steven Simon 47:20**

So the second question is, is is unrelated? It's sort of it's a bigger question that's appearing in a lot of posted questions.

**Emaddedin Badi 47:31**

Okay, fair enough. I mean, on Wagner and their involvement in Libya, we need to bear in mind that Wagner's sort of entrenchment in Libya, and its presence in Libya is not did not happen in a vacuum and it's not does not exist in a vacuum really. So it's influenced by influenced by a myriad of factors, whether domestic Russian factors, in some cases, Syrian related factors, and then Libyan domestic, domestic factors. I think what the kind of loss of the Wagner leadership, we want to call it diplomatically like that is is the extent to which will it will affect things will depend quite a lot on what the Russian state does, because at this stage, it's we need to look at Wagner DMC provided a strategic value for for Russia in terms of the definition of the group, how its dealt with how it learns the lives of blurs the lines sorry, of international law effectively, and it's a good, good modus operandi for plausible deniability, essentially. And then we need to look at the other side of the coin, which is the value added of the group for Haftar, specifically, both within conflict contexts where the where the group was quite influential in a combat setting, but also now as a sort of holding force, which tends to operate quite independently or with very loose coordination with certain individual commanders of, of the Libyan Arab armed forces. Now, whether this module is operandi can survive the loss of leadership, I suspect, yes, but this will require a little bit of investment and activity on the Russian particularly Ministry of Defense side to replace said, said kind of outfit, either as leadership, or the outfits as such, but the modus operandi, as such at this stage, I think will remain the way it is, maybe the names will change. A lot of the name of the outfit or the name of the commanders will change. But I don't think a lot of the activities will significantly more if they do, it's likely because of other contexts. So not just Russia, or Syria, or even what Turkey does, but even looking at other sub Saharan African context where Russia is now kind of using Libya as a logistical node for those purposes. So this is the context in which I kind of see the Russian Ministry of Defense delegation visit Benghazi recently. That's that's the lens through which I think

**Steven Simon 50:06**

I think that's really, that's really helpful

**Ben Fishman 50:11**

Two seconds on that, from the U.S. perspective, it will be in the various US interests in Libya, Wagner and getting rid of Wagner is certainly certainly one of them. And we don't know what the situation will be. But somehow it's the Defense Ministry and the Russian Defense Ministry chooses not to emphasize Libya. It's one less reason why the US should be invested there, or will justify being invested. Okay,

**Steven Simon 50:52**

Fair enough. We've got a 10 minutes, more than I wanted to. I guess I wanted to return to a question that stemmed from the beginning of our conversation, but it appears to be a big theme in the in the questions submitted in the q&a list, and that, I suppose these questions are mostly for Ben, but could be usefully responded to by all three of our panelists in the gist of the question is that as I read them, is what was this a good idea to begin with? Now, Ben made a spirited, you know, defense of, of the NATO intervention in in 2011. But, you know, I think what, what our audience is hearing from Mary and Emad, is that, you know, things are not going all that well, in that they are up in successive waves of civil conflict is in mod, you know, had had framed developments, the fragmentation of the state, and now, there might possibly be a process of consolidation underway, in in different forms. But in the meantime, you know, there's been a great deal of fragmentation of authority and, and, and state resources, as they've been, you know, extracted by these many militias, malicious parties and so forth. So, you know, I think our audience is looking at what they're looking at something of a disjuncture between your claim, Ben, that that, you know, this was a good idea, because Libyans are now better off than they were, you know, under Qaddafi. And, and, and descriptions of political developments that seemed to indicate that things are still quite difficult. So our audience, a number of people here are asking, Well, should we have done that? Maybe it wasn't such a good idea. So I thought it would be a good way to, to end the panel, with just some thoughts on the on the part of all three of you but beginning with with Ben, as to whether the NATO intervention was was was was the right thing to do under the circumstances?

**Ben Fishman**

53:49 Well, we can debate this for an hour or more. But I'll try to get to the point. There's a heavy debate, not just in Libya. But yes, you know, and you've written a book about this. And Phil Gordon is judged the same as what's the proper disposition of US policy in the region? And people argue that we should, because we haven't been successful, we should, you know, remove our ambitions. Our limit our ambitions, is particular to what I don't term regime change in Libya, but certainly regime change in Iraq and other places. That's one way of thinking. And you can there's plenty of evidence to suggest that I firmly believed for various reasons that we can and shouldn't do better. And that's another perspective and I don't have the time to list all the air Is that we could have improved over the last 12 years. One of the comments from my friend Bill, and the chat is referencing the murder of our ambassador, Chris Stevens, and in 2012, and that fundamentally affected our ability to principle against Libya, our political will and the political Fernstrom that resulted from that. Basically cut off all of our ambitions to help that government had that point. And then it came and went for various administrations and various secretaries. But I fundamentally think that we're the right. Pressure, and I mentioned it before it international pressure are US exerting pressure against the actors that are most involved in Libya, for a negative way, we can do a lot of good. And I'll leave it with one specific example, Libyan Libya had 2 million plus workers in Egyptian workers in in Benghazi and the eastern Libya, said before the revolution, I think that's almost zero. Now. Egypt has been one of the prime blockers of political agreement to hand to elections for the last several years. If they change their approach, the Egyptians exchange for their approach, they can return billions, millions of workers getting billions of dollars back into their economy that is utterly failing. And that's just an approach that they don't understand. Because they do a status quo as better than an unknown. And that's a bit I would be willing to take. But and I would emphasize, if I were in government now to there are Egyptians friends, but that's not for whatever reason, and approach that we're going. So obviously, I disagree, respectfully for the approach that we should not be invested, or we shouldn't have never have done anything. I admit many mistakes. But we don't have time to go through them. I did want to close with a plug for a book that Mary and Ahmad have written zoo brilliant champion chapters. When for that is, I don't know if it's out in the US or, but it's certainly out in Europe now. Violence in social transportation in Libya, that you can eat, since they're probably too humble to mention themselves. But if you want to deep dive into the internal conflicts that we've discussed, get that book. It's not cheap.

**Steven Simon 58:27**

Well, thanks, Ben. And congratulations, Mary and Emad. On that book sounds completely fascinating. And I'm looking forward to reading it myself. In the remaining 60 seconds, we have with the two co authors want to weigh in with a thumbs up or thumbs down on the question of intervention along the lines of the NATO intervention in Libya. Merit.

**Mary Fitzgerald 58:57**

I was going to say over to Emad as the as the Libyan on the panel.

**Emaddedin Badi 59:04**

I'll say that consensus on this is not I mean, yeah, there's no consensus on this even across Libyan audiences. But from I'll give you the perspective of a scholar very quickly and that of a Libyan also very quickly, for verse color standpoint, I think the NATO intervention was almost a state of the art example for a multilateral intervention conducted with a specific military goal in mind, target its strikes on strategic locales, minimal civilian casualties, although there are civilian casualties. Now, the other facet of the coin that you need to bear in mind is the aftermath and the failures and those discredit the intervention in a lot of cases post facto, which is which is relatively easy to do. In retrospect, there was a failure to plan a failure to insulate Libya from foreign interventionism after the fact. And I think the kind of popular feeling in Libya is that it reveals a little bit of degree of Western I want to call it duplicity, disdain or apathy for a very pop for the very population and wants claims to kind of protect because the RTP doctrine on the basis of which the intervention was engineered, the day is dead. And in a lot of cases, a lot of kind of the problems that we see are fed by US allies, partners, etc. So that's why I think the US gets a lot of the blame for the intervention. And for what a lot what a lot of happened thereafter. So yeah, that's why I think opinions differ to give you a bit of a diplomatic answer and wrap this up. But yeah, thank you again, for being with us.

**Steven Simon 1:00:38**

Thanks so much, Mary, do you want to add something to that?

**Mary Fitzgerald 1:00:43**

Very quickly, I spent months on the ground in Libya during the 2011 uprising. And it's been really interesting over the years to continue conversations with Libyans I met during that year. And it is fair to say that many Libyans look back to 2011. who supported the uprising they say they now regretted. They look at the horrors that have unfolded in Libya over the last 12 years. I think it's also important to note that, of course, Libya, Libya, as chaos allowed it to become a hub for human smuggling with all the attendant horrors associated with with that, that's something that Libyans who are not personally benefiting from that trade, if you like, they are appalled that their country has become a hub for this, as well as all the civil conflicts we've seen unfold. So I think going back to the point I made about the so called greens. I think that this question is tied up with the fate of the greens politically and otherwise in the future. I think that's going to tell us a lot about how Libyans, a majority of Libyans look back and reflect on the last 12 years. And ultimately, the question of whether 2011 was was worth it or not.

**Steven Simon 1:01:57** Thank you so much, and and for that, Mary, and thanks to the panel, this was extremely stimulating, very rich discussion. I'm sure that our viewers benefited greatly from it, and I look forward to our paths crossing again. So thank you very much.