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Help Libyans Liberate Themselves from Qadhafi

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Libya's long-suffering people have courageously risen in protest against Muammar Qadhafi's regime and are paying a heavy price for it. The regime has vowed to fight "to the last bullet" and has massacred peaceful demonstrators with machine guns, warplanes, and barbaric foreign mercenaries recruited from other African states.

The United States has a humanitarian interest in easing the suffering of Libyans and halting the regime's criminal atrocities and a strategic interest in removing the anti-Western dictatorship that has unleashed terrorism at home and abroad. The Obama Administration, which has muted its voice and equivocated on Libya, should take stronger action to achieve these goals.

Calls for Restraint Are Not Enough. The Obama Administration has blandly called for restraint from a brutal Libyan regime that is famous for its lack of restraint. The Administration has mistakenly lumped Libya together with other Arab countries roiled by protests, where it has called for restraint by governments confronted by the legitimate demands of their own citizens. But it has failed to distinguish between mildly authoritarian regimes in need of reform (such as those in Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco) and harshly repressive regimes (such as those led by mass murderers in Libya, Iran, and Syria).

When President Obama finally spoke on the Libyan crisis on Wednesday, he failed to call for Qadhafi's removal—the most logical step for ending the carnage, advancing the cause of freedom, and promoting American interests in the region. Although the Administration moved quickly to call for the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ear-

lier this month, it has been slow to call for Qadhafi's ouster, despite his long history of terrorism and clashes with the United States. The most significant action that the President announced was the dispatch of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Geneva next week to attend a meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Council, a notoriously dysfunctional body that includes Libya. Meanwhile, Qadhafi's ruthless regime is continuing its slaughter of its own people.

It is time for the Obama Administration to go beyond calls for restraint and demand that Qadhafi stop murdering his own people and retreat into exile. While Washington undoubtedly has less influence with Libya's dictatorship than it does with other Arab governments, it may have more influence with Libya's oppressed people than is commonly recognized. At a minimum, an American call for Qadhafi to step down could influence Libyans sitting on the fence to come down on the side of the opposition. This could help tilt the balance of power and end the fighting sooner.

If Qadhafi and his remaining supporters refuse to end their criminal atrocities, as is likely, then Washington should work with like-minded allies and other countries to:

- **Impose sanctions on the regime.** Washington should coordinate a global campaign to immedi-

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ately freeze the estimated \$32 billion of assets the Libyan government has deposited with foreign banks and freeze the assets of Libyan officials who remain loyal to the regime. It should call on all states to halt arms transfers to the regime, as Britain and France have already done. And it should mobilize international support for a ban on foreign investment in Libya until the current regime has been replaced by one that respects the rights of its own citizens.

- **Encourage further defections from the regime and warn Libyan officials that they will be held accountable for their crimes.** The United States should work with other states, particularly Egypt, to contact and encourage Libyan officials in key positions in the army, police, and intelligence services to turn against the regime. Those who reject the opportunity to do so should be put on notice that they risk future prosecution for crimes committed against the Libyan people. Washington should also lead an international effort to choke off the flow of mercenaries from Chad, Niger, Sudan, and other countries to Libya.
- **Provide humanitarian aid, medical supplies, and food to Libyans.** Libyans living in Egypt have organized themselves to provide emergency assistance to eastern Libya. The United States should do what it can to assist and expand on these efforts, eventually shipping humanitarian aid directly to ports liberated from the regime. This will provide concrete proof that Washington stands with the Libyan people against the oppressive regime.
- **Support Libya's opposition.** The sooner the regime's reign of terror ends, the lower the death toll, the smaller the disruption of Libyan oil exports, and the better chance Libya will have of making the difficult transition to a representative and responsive government. Given the lack of organized political parties and disintegration of much of Libya's weak army, Libya's traditional tribal networks are the most promising means of rapidly organizing an alternative to the regime. Washington should quietly make contact with key tribal leaders and encourage them to work together to consolidate the opposition's growing territorial reach and further constrict the regime's base of support.

- **Make contingency plans for the use of force.** Military force may be necessary to protect American citizens in Libya and halt the regime's brutal violence against civilians. But the Administration should prudently refrain from publicly threatening military action against the regime—including the imposition of no-fly zones—until Americans have had more time to evacuate. Any decision regarding the use of force should be linked directly to U.S. national interests and not subsumed under the problematic concept of the "responsibility to protect," which envisions the placement of decisions regarding U.S. forces in the hands of the U.N. Security Council or with the international community in general.
- **Make contingency plans to rebuild Libya's oil infrastructure.** Washington should take the lead in organizing an international task force of personnel drawn from relevant government agencies and oil companies to coordinate the deployment of equipment, materials, and technical specialists to repair oil fields, pipelines, and export terminals after peace has been restored. Although Libya's oil exports have not yet been severely disrupted, such preparations could help diminish the global economic repercussions if Libya's oil facilities are damaged in the ongoing conflict.
- **Investigate any new evidence about the Lockerbie bombing.** Libya's Justice Minister, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, defected to the opposition and now claims that he has proof that Qadhafi personally ordered the 1988 airline bombing that killed 270 people—most of them Americans—over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Hope for Change. The Obama Administration should stop equivocating and call for Qadhafi to step down and depart Libya. Only a change of regime can halt the killing, give Libyans hope for a better future, and protect America's long-term interests in North Africa.

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