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## U.S. POLICY IN LIBYA

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**Statement for the Record**  
**Jonathan M. Winer, U.S. Special Envoy for Libya**

**Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**June 15, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cardin, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. foreign policy on Libya. I have just returned from consultations with regional and European partners to discuss our mutual support for the transitional Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, whose challenges include ending civil conflict, promoting stability and addressing the ongoing terrorist threat.

Our strategic interest in Libya is to support a unified, accountable government that meets the economic and security needs of the Libyan people. We also seek a government with whom we can partner on bilateral and regional objectives, including countering terrorism and illegal migration which threaten security and stability across North Africa and in Europe. To address this, we have maintained a policy of clear and ongoing support for both the GNA and implementation of the UN-facilitated Libyan Political Agreement which established it.

Mr. Chairman, Libya's woes are well known. The 42 years of rule by Muammar Qaddafi left a legacy of weakened institutions with limited capacity, which have in turn been further damaged by infighting among contenders for political power. In 2014, Libya's government split into two groups, each of whom contended they were legitimate, one based in the west in Tripoli, the other, recognized by the United States, in the East in Tobruk, with a term due to end as of October 21, 2015. It was in response to that political crisis that the United States worked with other countries to support the UN Mission in Libya, UNSMIL, in the negotiation of the Libyan Political Agreement in Skhirat, Morocco which brought about the GNA on December 17, 2015, establishing the current Presidency Council as the Executive, continuing the House of Representatives as Libya's legislature, and establishing the State Council as a consultative body.

The Political Agreement was a necessity. During the preceding period of rival governments, according to UN estimates, the violence affected some 2.5 million in Libya and displaced more than 430,000. Human traffickers and

smugglers have exploited the country's porous borders and weak central government to enable a spectacular rise in irregular migration across the Mediterranean into southern Europe. At the same time, the Libyan people have suffered from growing economic challenges, as Libyan oil has slid from daily production of 1.5 million barrels to an average of about 350,000 barrels per day during 2015, and efforts to adjust spending and overall instability led to shortages of medical supplies and rising prices on many necessities. With no monopoly of control of security by a state, terrorist and criminal groups established a presence in various areas in Libya. These would be profound challenges for any government, and they are especially difficult for the GNA which seeks to govern by consensus and which has to build capacity starting from near-scratch.

The GNA's Presidency Council moved to Tripoli on March 30 where it was welcomed by the overwhelming majority of Libyans who want an end to the chaos and fighting. Since its arrival the GNA has demonstrated its commitment to inclusiveness and national reconciliation and begun the critical work of rebuilding the Libyan state. Libyans are turning their attention away from fighting one another and starting to address their common challenges, and today Libyan forces aligned with the GNA are engaged in sustained fighting against Da'esh in the city of Sirte and making impressive gains against a ruthless enemy.

The United States has offered its unequivocal support to the GNA. Secretary Kerry and leadership from more than 20 countries have underscored our shared commitment to the government as it combats Da'esh and other violent extremist groups in Libya, most recently at a May 16 ministerial meeting on Libya in Vienna. At that meeting Libyan Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj articulated the contours of Libya's security needs and announced a series of steps to stabilize the country. The GNA has announced plans to form a Presidential Guard and established command centers to combat Da'esh in Sirte, and GNA ministers have begun working in a caretaker capacity pending formal action by the Libyan parliament. The Libyans will look to the United States for our help as it continues to move forward in addressing these challenges, and we are prepared to give it.

There is relative stability and calm in Tripoli, due in large part to the GNA's outreach to local leaders, though we recognize the GNA must decrease its dependency on the patchwork of militias in Tripoli and form a reliable and regular security force. The GNA has been clear in its intent to establish inclusive, national forces; it must also continue to build its support base and expand stability and calm throughout the country. International support for the GNA has consistently been strong; the United States, United Nations, EU, Arab League, and virtually all of the

key European and Middle Eastern countries have expressed their support for the GNA, and UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 2259 made clear that the GNA is the sole legitimate government of Libya.

Nevertheless, much work remains to fully implement the Libya Political Agreement and achieve durable and broad political reconciliation. A small minority of hardliners in the House of Representatives has blocked implementation of the Libyan Political Agreement by repeatedly obstructing a vote to formally endorse the GNA Cabinet and amend the country's Constitutional Declaration. The EU sanctioned the House speaker, Agila Issa, for playing "spoiler" to the political process on April 1; the United States designated Issa for sanctions on May 13. We continue to urge all Libyans to put aside their personal interests in the name of uniting Libya under the GNA, so that Libyans in all parts of the country – east, west and south – can start rebuilding their nation.

We similarly support the GNA's efforts to bring the various armed actors in Libya under its consolidated command and control, through an approach that is inclusive and integrative. We have been encouraged to see many armed groups welcome and align with the GNA and respond to its call for a joint offensive on Da'esh. Prime Minister Sarraj continues to try to broaden the offensive, to include the units led by General Khalifa Haftar, and in Vienna made the case strongly that a united Libyan front to combat Da'esh is the only viable option.

With an estimated 3,000 to 6,500 fighters, Da'esh's Libya branch is considered the most successful of the eight official branches outside of Syria and Iraq and has the potential to do great damage to the GNA's efforts to establish itself and govern the country. Da'esh is likely to continue its attempts to further destabilize the region, export terror to sub-Saharan Africa, and threaten to attack Europe's southern flank. Da'esh had controlled the central coastal town of Sirte since summer 2015, and is believed to have a presence in Tripoli, Benghazi, Ajdabiya, Derna, Sabratha, and other major towns and cities. But as we have seen in recent weeks, Da'esh's presence in Libya is now being challenged by the GNA and a range of Libyan forces, throughout the coastal region and including Sirte. Da'esh has lost substantial ground everywhere that it has been challenged by Libyans – but we have reports that elements of it are going underground, readying themselves for future assaults on Libya, its people, and its institutions. The struggle is likely to continue for some time to come.

Da'esh's current losses in Libya should not be completely surprising. Its branch in Libya is different in many ways from the core in Syria and Iraq: among

Libya's mostly Sunni population, Da'esh has been unable to exploit a Sunni-Shia divide to recruit and win ideological favor. It also lacks the ability to use oil smuggling as a major revenue-generating resource as it does in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, Libyans do not welcome foreign actors. Polling shows Libyans overwhelmingly view Da'esh as an unwelcome foreign phenomenon. We have now seen Libyans rally in opposition to Da'esh in multiple locations, expelling them from the city of Derna, for example.

Action against Da'esh in Libya is needed for the safety of Libyans, but also for the safety of their neighbors. Libya's porous borders and political and security vacuum have allowed Da'esh to plan and carry out significant attacks in Tunisia and Libya. A number of other terrorist organizations also operate in Libya, including the Benghazi and Derna factions of Ansar al-Sharia, which led the 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, as well as Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Murabitun.

Our counterterrorism policy in Libya is focused on degrading Da'esh and other violent extremist groups and reducing the threat they pose to U.S. interests in North Africa and Europe. In Libya as elsewhere, the President has made clear his willingness to take action wherever our interests are in danger. In the past year the United States has conducted direct action against several terrorist targets in Libya: our June 2015 strike near the city of Ajdabiya targeted Al-Qaida-affiliated Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar; our November 2015 strike outside Derna killed Iraqi national and senior Da'esh figure in Libya Abu Nabil al-Anbari; and our February 19 strikes took out a Da'esh training camp and a foreign fighter facilitator in the western town of Sabratha. We also are focused on disrupting connections between the Da'esh branch in Libya and the core group in Iraq and Syria, and the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL has committed to a concerted push to halt the flow of foreign fighters to Libya, disrupt Da'esh finances there, and counter and defeat its destructive message.

Meanwhile the United States is expanding contacts with a range of groups in Libya, with the objective of identifying and assisting willing and capable potential partners that work under the GNA's command. We also actively work with Libya's neighbors on terrestrial and maritime border security to shut down the cross-border flow of weapons and fighters. This is a particularly difficult challenge in Libya, especially in the south, and for long-term success we need a strong, accountable Libyan security force.

At the meeting in Vienna, Prime Minister Sarraj announced plans to seek equipment and training for GNA forces. The GNA will need the support of the U.S. and international community to be successful in this effort. We are working with the GNA and our international partners to determine what assistance can be provided and, at the same time, to determine ways to enforce the embargo to prevent arms shipments to groups operating outside GNA authority. Prime Minister al-Sarraj has been clear that Libya does not need or desire a military intervention, but that it will need the international community's support to win the fight against Da'esh.

It will take time for the GNA to establish the security institutions and capacity to combat Da'esh, guard its borders and fully protect its citizens. The United States recognizes that this will be a long fight, and that we will need to provide help in coordination with our allies. But we are encouraged that the political conditions on the ground are improving to allow a strong counterterrorism partnership.

As we see some progress on the political and security fronts in Libya, we remain deeply concerned about the destructive impact of the ongoing violence on the civilian population in Libya. The GNA must move quickly to address systemic governance and justice issues. Libyans and migrants in Libya are also in need of urgent humanitarian relief. Men, women, and children in Libya deserve basic services and improved living conditions. The United States has already committed more than \$4 million of humanitarian assistance in our current fiscal year to Libya through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as \$1 million to an international humanitarian NGO to help address the most urgent public health needs throughout Libya. This brings our total humanitarian assistance to more than \$115 million since the start of the conflict.

Currently, the Administration is planning to provide \$35 million in FY 2016 and prior year funds to help Libya's political transition produce an accountable and effective national government. U.S. support remains essential to strengthening Libya's democratic and governance institutions, and supporting regional security. As part of this assistance, the United States also intends to commit up to \$4 million in support of the UNDP-led Stabilization Facility for Libya, intended to provide support to small-scale infrastructure projects, build municipal administrative capacity, and enable local conflict resolution and mediation.

Working with the Libyan government and private sector, we are supporting targeted economic engagements that expand links with the United States and the global economy. Furthermore, to help Libyan young people prepare for careers in the global economy and broaden our people-to-people relationships, the United States is funding scholarships, professional exchanges, and English-language learning programs.

In addition, the Administration has requested \$20.5 million for assistance to Libya in FY 2017 from Congress. These funds will enable us to respond quickly to Libya's emerging needs and support programs to increase security and counterterrorism capabilities, while helping the GNA function as an inclusive and rights-respecting national government. Funds will build Libyan governance capacity, crucial to stopping the spread of terrorist groups.

We understand the need to ensure our assistance and programming is flexible. We will respond to assistance requests from the GNA and continue to engage a broad range of Libyan stakeholders, such as senior officials of the new government, civil society, tribes, women, and youth. Despite instability and political divisions in 2014 and 2015, the United States continued implementation of key programs supporting the democratic political transition, particularly at the local level, through local partners. Active programs in over 15 Libyan municipalities representing 75 percent of the population support civil society, elected officials, entrepreneurs, and municipal governments. The United States continues to work with local institutions - mayors, council members, and staff - on service delivery, violence prevention strategies, and local government administration.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee: as I described at the outset today, the United States supports the aspirations of the Libyan people for a united, inclusive, and responsive national government capable of overcoming the country's significant political challenges and divisions since the 2011 revolution. The U.S. government is deeply engaged with Libya because we have shared interests that are essential to our national security. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering any questions you have.