

1-1-2013

## Tribalism and Democratic Transition in Libya: Lessons from Iraq

Christine N. Myers

*Pepperdine University*, [cnmyers@pepperdine.edu](mailto:cnmyers@pepperdine.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Myers, Christine N. (2013) "Tribalism and Democratic Transition in Libya: Lessons from Iraq," *Global Tides*: Vol. 7, Article 5.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/globaltides/vol7/iss1/5>

This International Studies and Languages is brought to you for free and open access by the Seaver College at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Global Tides by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu).

## **Tribalism and Democratic Transition in Libya: Lessons from Iraq**

Christine N. Myers

After the United States had for decades supported Middle-Eastern autocrats under the pretext that they maintained stability, George W. Bush changed United States policy to support the formation of democratic governments and used this as one pretext to justify an invasion of Iraq. After the wave of protests in the Arab Spring that resulted in regime changes in various Middle Eastern countries, the U.S. must consider the level and nature of support it will provide to developing democracies and specifically Libya. These considerations must include the actions the United States should take to encourage state stability and to discourage both violent uprisings and the expansion of powers of leaders. Historically, tribes create parallel structures of governance that compete with state administration as well as loyalties that cause tribal members to seek benefits for their groups instead of compromising for a national good.

Following the overthrow of regimes expressing “anti-tribal” ideologies, the threat of renewed civil war exists in Middle Eastern societies in emerging democracies. Western nations witnessing transitions in tribal societies fear that the revolutions are simply tribal civil wars and that collective goals pursued in revolutions disguise underlying divisions and tensions. For these reasons divides will often re-emerge following revolutions that result in regime overthrow. The threat of renewed civil war is not a strictly Middle Eastern phenomenon; in fact, “over forty percent” of governments that have civil war go back into civil war within ten years (Hoeffler). Civil war recidivists believe that the Middle East is inherently volatile due to broiling tensions that can only

be suppressed in autocratic regimes. Foreign policy-makers must understand when tensions are inherent parts of deep and fundamental loyalties when they are reactions to political realities within groups that are not necessarily militantly defensive of their social groups.

Important differences exist in the nature of tribalism in Iraq and Libya. Still, an analysis of U.S. actions in the Iraq war and the consequences of these actions helps to analyze the potential for democratic state-building within tribal societies. This analysis also helps to identify potential strategies for working with tribes to promote national and citizen security and transition to stable democracy.

This paper will explore the role of tribalism in colonial Iraq and Libya both historically and at present. It will discuss the ideology and actions of the Ba'athist Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the *Jamahiriyah* under Muahmmar Gaddafi in Libya. Both leaders exploited tribal loyalties to bolster their power by recruiting the members of certain tribes into security and military forces, by granting high governmental positions, and by distributing oil subsidies to tribal leaders. The paper will also explore the role of the tribe in governments after Hussein and Gaddafi were removed from power. In the case of Iraq, tactics were used by the U.S. to unite Sunni tribesmen. Democratic elections have to an extent represented the country's Sunni and Kurdish minorities. In Libya, opposition forces were able to unify to a great enough extent to overthrow Gaddafi and the country is transitioning to representative democracy.

The paper will also explore the role of tribalism today and its prevalence in Libya and Iraq. It will consider the problems tribalism poses to democratization in both countries. These threats to democratization include continued corruption and

clientelism, a lack of economic stability and administrative capacity, the existence of militias, the inconsistent administration of justice, and continued violence between militias and tribal groups.

In order to address these threats, security policy must take into consideration tribalistic characteristics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This will include the need to represent tribal interests and prevent discontent with the new government that could incite further conflict. Policy must also address the potential threat posed by disparate militias and other groups that may seek to capitalize on the overthrow of the Muahmmar Gaddafi. An understanding of the influence of tribalism on these factors and an analysis of how the U.S. can collaborate with tribes and ensure their representation in new democracies will help to create U.S. policy that decreases continued violence and encourages the formation of stable democratic state.

## **TRIBALISM**

Tribal loyalties are apparent within the fabric of Arab society and remain a significant part of political mobilization that “persist even where its immediate political expression is suppressed or destroyed” (Bates and Rassam, 275). These loyalties derive from familial and kinship ties and are representative of local or regional interests, whether or not tribes are formally recognized (Bates and Rassam, 275). In Middle Eastern tribal society, tribes themselves are defined by lineage ties of male members, and lineages can often be traced to a single male ancestor (Bates, Rassam, 265). Tribes share

religion, language, symbols, traditions, and most often last names. The encyclopedia of the social sciences describes;

Tribalism may be defined as the maintenance by a tribal society of its organization, ways, and autonomy in the face of change. But tribalism may be defined differently when a tribe's claim of identity has less to do with its primitivism or indigeneity than with its ethnic discreteness and cultural distinctiveness for gaining material or political advantages (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences).

The tribe is not monolithic in influence but instead can play diverse political roles. In tribes that have recognized political administration, legal issues are decided by local courts and tribal sheiks. These tribes can be autonomous and self-sustaining, but also often unite in trade or alliances with other tribes to gain material and political advantages. In states with autocratic governments, these material gains include economic or security guarantees as well as high governmental positions. In many countries in the modern MENA region, tribal loyalties still exist when tribes are not autonomous and do not directly control their political affairs. While these tribes have little or no official political role, they still provide an identity and specific culture that might also provide mutual assistance.

Tribal administration can be starkly different from state governance, a concept that is described by anthropologist Philip Carl Salzman. The main difference between the tribal and state systems of governance is the element of self-help versus the concept of giving up certain advantages in favor of a national good. Tribes in the Middle

East in some cases are completely autonomous, providing for their own defense and administering justice within a legal framework set by tribes and administered by tribal sheiks. Their operation differs from that of “states, which are centralized, have political hierarchies, and have specialized institutions—such as courts, police, tax collectors, and an army—to maintain social control and defense” (Salzman, 22-33).

A history of tribalism in Middle Eastern Arab states affects their political and military activity and will affect the outcomes of regime changes and the stability of new states. It should also be noted that Middle Eastern countries exhibit heterogeneity that is not limited to tribal differences but also includes diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious and sectarian differences (Bates and Rassam, 260). In many cases, the actions of leaders and the nature of political systems exacerbate tensions between tribal groups. Regimes often use tribal loyalties to gain support or to discourage opposition. The role of the tribe is in large part determined by the form of civil society and governance in each country in relation to the tribe.

State governments have in many cases sought to undermine the political salience of the tribe as a parallel structure that threatened the functionality of the central government by employing socialist, nationalist, and Islamist ideologies. Despite their stated opposition to tribal division, governments often exploit tribal loyalties by appealing to tribal leaders (sheiks) in order to gain the loyalty of tribal organizations. The potential of leaders to exploit these differences is explained by Bates and Rassam, who describe, “[w]hat sets unilineal descent apart from kinship is that it defines groups or potential groups vis-à-vis one another; in this way unilineality can and often does become a potent political principle” (Bates and Rassam, 265). Thus, the derivation of

identity from a single lineage creates an evident and concrete bond that denotes a difference from outside groups. While some countries have attempted to blur the lines between tribes by strengthening civil society organizations and central government, others have governed in ways that purposefully exacerbate divides within their systems of governance.

## **TRIBAL DEMOGRAPHICS**

In Iraq and Libya, hundreds of tribes still exist and influence the political behavior of the countries' citizens. At the same time, both countries have modernized and urbanized causing tribalism to play a less concrete political role than during colonial and pre-colonial eras. In Iraq, tribal differences exist in conjunction with sectarian and ethnic divisions. These differences are especially influential in certain regions, such as Al-Anbar province. In Libya, sectarian differences are less important than the tribal differences that exist between the three historical regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan.

In Iraq, tribal, tribal loyalties as well as ethnic and sectarian differences remain influential parts of society. The history of tribalism in Iraq is one characterized by "personal honor, factionalism, and intense individualism" (Yaphe, 13). Tribal groupings are centered around *Khams*, a unit of tribal society that refers to males sharing a common great grandfather (Hassan). Large extended families make up "houses," and various houses comprise a "clan" (Hassan). Clans group to form tribes, which can range

vary greatly in size. The largest tribal grouping in Iraqi society is the tribal federation, which can be an influential political force.

Tribal federations are usually, but not necessarily, divided along sectarian lines and some include both Shi'a and Sunni branches. Iraq has an estimated 150 tribes and 2,000 clans (Hassan). Islamic Shi'as make up sixty to sixty-five percent of Iraqi people, while Sunnis make up between thirty-two and thirty seven percent. Kurds, which are mostly Sunni, comprise between fifteen and twenty percent of the population (CIA World Factbook). Most of the remaining population, including Sunnis and most Shi'as, are of Arab ethnicity.

Libya is also a diverse and pluralistic state where tribalism still plays a significant role. Most of the population of Libya lives in urban areas; nearly half of Libyans live in the city of Tripoli and two-thirds live cities along the country's coast (St. John, xix). Libya was historically divided into the provinces of Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Cyrenaica. These provinces no longer exist in name, but the regions still have stark demographic differences.

Libya is comprised of an estimated 140 tribes, about fifty percent of which are considered significant (Tarkowski and Omar). Arab-Berbers, Libya's main ethnic group, make up about ninety percent of Libya's population (Tarkowski and Omar). Arab-Berbers are descendants of the beduoin Berber tribes of the Maghreb desert and Arabs who colonized North Africa. Tripolitana has eight tribes that trace their roots to Bani Hilal and Bani Sulaim, both Arab-Berber tribes. Tribes in Cyreneica include two branches of the Bani Hilal tribe (St. John, xix). Mostly nomadic Tebou and Tuareg tribes inhabit the desert regions in the Southwest part of the country in the province of Fazzan and the



Berbers inhabit the Nafusa Mountains in Western Libya (Tarkowski and Omar). The country also has smaller populations of Duwud and Libyans from Sub-Saharan Africa especially in the Southern regions (St. John, xix).

## **COLONIAL GOVERNANCE**

While tribal loyalties take on a very different form in the modern MENA region than in previous eras, it is helpful to consider the attempts of Western powers to impose new political systems in tribal societies during the colonial era. In the colonial era following World War One and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, British, French, and Italian occupations colonized countries in the MENA region and imposed new governance systems. These systems of governance were in many cases not sensitive to local and tribal administrative systems. Colonial movements were often viewed as imperialist advances and responded to with “liberation” efforts from the countries they colonized.

In Libya and Iraq, colonizing powers used violent oppression to quell opposition to colonial rule. However, the two cases have significant differences. In the case of Iraq, Britain united tribal sheiks in order to oppose Italian rule. In both countries, monarchical rule installed by the colonial powers was opposed by unrepresented tribes and factions and the governments were subjected to various coups d’etat.

The British were given mandate rule over modern-day Iraq after World War One. Mandate rule was viewed by the local populations as a form of colonialism. The response to the perceived oppression instigated a revolt in 1920 that was brutally quelled by the British through military means including uninhibited use of aerial warfare

tactics. Following the revolt, the British granted independence to Iraq and installed monarchical Hashemite rule in the Kingdom of Iraq under Faisal I (Yaphe, 12). The heterogeneous nature of society made this a difficult task because both southern tribesmen and Kurds resented the ruling system. The army was comprised of Sunni Arabs, Sunni Kurds, and Shi'a Arabs, but dominated by Sunni Arabs who held most leadership positions. These varying interests made the army leadership susceptible to repeated coups.

Libya was colonized by Italy in the 1930s. Italy dominated the country's politics after fighting a war with the Libyan people. In the early 1900s, the Bedouin tribes in Cyreneica unified to resist Italian dominance of the region after which Libyans were allowed autonomy. The history of conflict with the Italians impelled the Cyreneican Sanusi (a Bedouin order) to unite with the region of Tripolitania and govern as the amir of Libya (St. John, iii). However, soon after this recognition, Mussolini's fascist Italian regime sought to gain control over the country and violently suppressed Libyan tribal opposition. After the Italians regained control, the country was administered by a government of only Italian leaders. After World War Two, the British took control of the provinces of Tripolitania and Cyreneica while the French colonized the Fezzan province. The British were able to engage mostly Cyreneican tribes to liberate the country from Italian rule in the Libyan Arab Force (Hurewitz, 62-63). King Idris became ruled Libya under a federalist system and surrounded himself with a ruling oligarchy of tribal sheiks (St. John, iv). The Cyreneican Defense Force was created from the Libyan Arab Force and was the favored defense force of the king (Hurewitz, 63).

## **POST-COLONIAL GOVERNMENTS: HUSSEIN AND GADDAFI**

Post-colonial autocratic governments have exploited tribal loyalties to increase their hold on power. Religions and ideologies including Islam, nationalism, Arab socialism, and others have bolstered the legitimacy of the regimes of various countries and allowed them to deny political participation to citizens. Religion and nationalism both represent ideals and beliefs that attempt to supersede loyalties created by ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and tribal differences. Despite the original aims of these ideologies to undermine tribal influence, governments employing such ideologies often will use tribal loyalties to gain military or political support. Especially in oil rich countries, this is done by distributing oil subsidies to loyal factions and also by giving high military and governmental positions to leaders of these groups.

In Libya and Iraq, Arab-nationalist socialist governments under Muahmmar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein respectively, have sought to decrease the political role of tribes while simultaneously exploiting tribal loyalties to gain power. In these countries, both Gaddafi and Hussein engaged in clientelism by utilizing familial loyalties to give “access to institutions, business opportunities, and bureaucratic approval, or even to clear the mundane hurdles of everyday life [through] strategically placed intermediaries” (Bates and Rassam, 297). Oil subsidies were granted to gain legitimacy and facilitate relationships to gain loyalties of tribal and other groups. State institutions, especially those controlling oil production and distribution, were built up so that the country was reliant on the state. In addition to subsidies, loyal factions received high government

positions and other privileges. Clientelism continued with little resistance in part because the high level of state control of institutions allowed for very little transparency.

In Iraq, Ba'athist regimes under General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein claimed to oppose tribal distinctions. The Ba'athist ideology emphasized "modernity and [rejected] ethnic/sectarian divisions, tribalism, and religion as the basis for a modern state (Terrill, 7). The Hussein regime sought to suppress tribal loyalties by outlawing the use of tribal names and instituting agrarian reform (Hassan). Despite the original intentions and stated opposition of the regime toward tribes, the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein exploited tribal loyalties to gain political and military support. The regime began to use these loyalties to recruit soldiers in the war that Iraq fought against Iran from 1980 to 1988 (Hassan). Hussein was able to gain the military support of Shi'a Arabs who were impelled by resentment toward Iranian Persian tribes (Yaphe, 14).

Hussein continued to exploit tribal loyalties to remain in control of the country after the war with Iran and the Gulf War. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein were both part of the Albu Nasir tribe within the al-Tikriti tribal confederation located in the city bearing its name, Tikrit. Hussein's alliance with the Albu Nasir tribe, which itself had an estimated 350,000 male members, and with the Tikriti confederation, allowed him to gain the support of most Sunni Arabs of the city (Hassan). Although the Tikriti tribal confederation was one not one of the largest in Iraq, the Ba'athist party was able to partner with the tribe and institute control over the country through "explicit military oppression [and] multiple levels of security agencies" (Stolzoff). Members of Hussein's Albu Nasir tribe provided security for the most elite regime personnel while related tribes

constituted the Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, and other security, military, and intelligence organizations (Yaphe, 17). Much of the country's Sunni majority supported Hussein because his government represented the interests of the Sunni minority that governed the country. The Arab Nationalist ideologies of the regime did not appeal to Shi'a Arabs in the country who perceived the ideology to be a ploy to pursue alliances with Sunni countries such as Syria (Yaphe, 16). Neither was it supported by the country's Kurdish population, which sought but never achieved full autonomy under Hussein (Yaphe, 16). The relationship between the Kurdish population and the Hussein regime was characterized by periods of calm and relative autonomy and violent confrontation, war and Kurdish oppression (Yaphe, 19-22).

In Libya, Muahmmar Gaddafi instituted the socialist Arab-nationalist "Third Universal Theory" that outlawed political parties and discouraged tribal administration. The Libyan government under Gaddafi - the *Jamahiriya* - eventually exploited tribal loyalties to bolster its political power. Gaddafi was part of the Qadadfa tribe in the region of Sirte, which was loyal to him and given the most important security roles. This tribe, however, was one of the smaller tribes and therefore Gaddafi also leaned on the military support of various tribal confederations. These tribes included Libya's largest, the Warfalla tribe, as well as the influential Magarha tribe centered in the southern Sabha region and Tarhouna tribes in Tripoli (Terrill,76-77). In an attempt to keep military weak, he failed to professionalize, centralize, or modernize the armed forces. His regime intentionally exacerbated tribal rivalry and left various militias to report to different commanding officers.

While the Gaddafi regime opposed tribalism, it encouraged local self-government in the form of “natural leaders, serving on a three-year rotational basis” (Tarowski and Omar). This system was referred to as “Popular Social Leadership” and resulted in tribal sheiks having substantial control over local law, governance, and development (Tarowski and Omar). These local governance systems often undermined the legal system of the state and allowed for a level of corruption that frustrated Libyans (Tarowski and Omar).

Tuareg and Tebu tribes were largely deprived of citizenship under Gaddafi, and certain rights were withheld. For these reasons, the tribes generally had a negative view of the Gaddafi regime. While these groups were largely ignored, Gaddafi made some attempts to gain their loyalty or to utilize them in strategic military efforts. The Tuareg were employed as manpower in the war against Chad and the Tebu tribes were given material aid in various wars conducted by the tribes (Tarkowski and Omar). In Eastern Libya, tribal members still payed taxes to tribal sheiks while Gaddafi was in power, and legal power was in certain cases exercised by tribal leaders (Tarkowski and Omar).

## **REGIME CHANGE AND CHALLENGES TO STATE FORMATION**

In both Iraq and Libya, the historical influence of tribes poses certain challenges to the formation of a democratic state. These include challenges to the formation of a national identity caused by both the nature of the tribe itself in terms of seeking advantages for the group and the diversity of groups with historical tensions and specific interests. Combined with a lack of experience of democratic government, these influences have

resulted in corruption and unsuccessful economic policies, lawlessness, and renewed violence that could threaten state-building efforts in Libya and Iraq. At the same time, certain strategies that address these issues have reached some success in unifying tribal groups.

After the overthrow of the Hussein regime in Iraq, Al Qaeda in Iraq gained substantial political power and recruited mostly Sunni tribesmen in insurgency efforts. Tribal loyalties were used in the U.S. counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq beginning in 2006 to quell violence in the country. The United States led an effort created by then-Commanding General of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, David Petraeus, to work in collaboration with local populations to counter the insurgency. The United States payed Sunni tribesmen in Al-Anbar province to cease attacks against American forces and also worked through the leadership of tribal sheiks to unite tribes to provide regional security (West, 288). The strategy not only allowed local collaboration to suppress insurgency but also provided resources to more accurately target Al Qaeda cells. The Sunni Awakening was a change from the former U.S. strategy of working with Shi'a groups that had opposed the government of Saddam Hussein. The success of the counterinsurgency strategy presents an example of the potential to work with tribal leadership to bolster security and decrease violence, especially through material influence such as monetary payments.

While administering economic support at the local level was successful in gaining influence for American commanders, the failure of the U.S. to implement a more comprehensive strategy resulted in continued corruption and a lack of distribution of federal revenues to necessary state-building projects. The Commanders' Insurgency

Response Program allowed commanders to “respond with a nonlethal weapon to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief, and reconstruction projects and services that immediately assist the indigenous population and that the local population or government can sustain” (Commanders’ Insurgency Response Program). Still, in 2007, development funds only made up five percent of Iraq’s budget (West, 340). In his book *The Strongest Tribe*, Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Francis J. “Bing” West argues that of the \$60 billion in revenues, \$20 billion was hoarded while “US tax dollars were spent” (West, 371). The role of the tribe in the distribution of economic aid needed to be considered not only in security and counterinsurgency phases but also in transition phases (Taylor). The Iraqi government lacks the administrative capability to distribute funds and build infrastructure. Additionally, much of the country’s oil revenue is still used to benefit bureaucrats and politicians. The failure to build economic administrative capabilities in Iraq demonstrated the necessity of a plan to distribute economic aid in democracy building efforts.

In Iraq, the tendency of tribes to seek to gain material advantages for their groups has contributed to continued clientelism and corruption. The level of corruption in Iraq has had the dangerous effect of angering non-Shi’a Iraqis, and especially Iraqi Sunnis who perceive corruption as protecting Shi’a interests. Transparency International ranks Iraq the eighth most corrupt country on its “corruption perception index” (Transparency International). The rampant corruption during the insurgency in Iraq harkens back to the Hussein regime and the precedent of clientelism exercised by granting oil subsidies and positions of power. West explains “the magnet of profit without work drew power to the center in Iraq and all other oil-exporting countries,



creating entrenched interests whose livelihoods depended on maintaining centralized control over the dispersal of revenues.” Prime Minister Al Maliki ordered an end to forty-eight corruption cases in 2007 and protected all Iraqi ministers from investigations (West, 341). Furthermore, the insurgency in Iraq increased corruption because the practices are mutually supportive. Corruption is used to fund insurgent activities while it also places pressure on the government to engage in corrupt activities when they are necessary to end violence (Gunter). In the country, corruption was in part linked to the lack of representation of certain localities and groups including Sunnis.

While it is still rampant, recent improvements have been made to combat corruption. There have been reductions in fuel subsidies, a former element of clientelism, in part due to pressure from the International Monetary Fund (Gunter). It has also been speculated that the democratic structure and related loosening of state controls will allow corruption to become more evident to the public, especially through media which will put pressure on the government to limit it.

A lack of experience of democratic elections as well as corruption in elections has weakened the potential of the Iraqi government to become a stable representative democracy. Hope for Sunni representation was diminished in the elections of 2005 and 2010 due in part to corruption and a Sunni boycott of the elections. During both election cycles, Sunnis boycotted the polls because some of their desired leaders were disqualified from running for office (Myers). While the elections of January, 2005 were judged to be fair, the turnout of Sunni Arabs was minimal. In the election, Shi’a Prime Minister Nuri Kamil Mohammed Hasan al-Maliki was elected President, a result which would not be approved by most of the country’s Sunni population. The December

elections of the same year were changed to a proportional representation system that would be more representative of minority groups.

While the January, 2010 elections were judged by the international community to have been conducted fairly, corruption was still a concern and instances of corruption were discovered. For example, the head of the Iraqi election commission was found to have given bonuses to five employees (Arango). While this was a seemingly small incidence of corruption, it represented a microcosm of the corruption concerns facing the democracy formation in Iraq after an era plagued by “corrupt oil deals and government contracts” (Arango). Generally, Sunni Arabs have complained that the Al-Maliki government is not representative of its interests (Maliki).

Post-revolution Libya faces many of the same problems that are still being confronted in Iraq including violence between militias, problems with the emerging democratic system, and continued lawlessness and corruption. Opposition groups within Libya overthrew the Gaddafi government in 2011. These groups were mostly centered in Cyrenaica, while forces loyal to Gaddafi were centered in Tripolitania. The military tactics employed by NATO to overthrow Gaddafi ended violence from loyal militias against the opposition. Throughout the revolution, certain tribes tended to either support Gaddafi or the opposition, although loyalties did not strictly adhere to tribal lines. The largest Libyan tribe of about two million, the Warfalla tribe, remained loyal to Gaddafi throughout the revolution. The National Liberation Army in some capacity employed tribal loyalties to fight against Gaddafi’s armed forces. Following the 2011 revolution, the National Transitional Council represented mostly the interests of rebel forces based in Cyrenaica. The General National Council elected in July, 2012 may

allow for the successful democratization of Libya but so far has still demonstrated injustice toward certain tribes, especially those that had supported Gaddafi and has not been able to quell violence.

Militias in post-revolution Libya pose a threat to the centralization of police forces and have resulted in continued violence and lawlessness in the country, which the National Transitional Council failed to address. Militias include over one hundred groups that are supposedly unified under the Union of Revolutionary Forces. Violent confrontations between Masrata and Benghazi rebels have occurred on various occasions (Tarkowski and Omar). Militias are not adhering to the rule of law and have executed loyalists. In July 2011, General Younis, who had defected from Gaddafi's army during the revolution died under mysterious circumstances, seeming to have been executed by rebel forces which caused further divide among rebel militias (Tarkowski and Omar). Libya's largest tribe, the Warfalla, has faced a siege in the region of Bani Walid as a response of the General National Congress to the killing of Omran Shaaban, who is thought to have assassinated Gaddafi (Amnesty). The Libyan army has used unnecessary force and made a number of likely unnecessary arrests of suspects. The security threat of the militias also materialized in the attack by the Islamist Ansar al-Sharia militia against the U.S. Embassy that killed U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans.

Corruption still exists in Libya although it does not necessarily reflect a protracted trend. While the National Transitional Council governed, it largely failed to pursue justice by freeing inmates jailed during the revolution. During the election, there was some reported destruction of ballot boxes although the election was overall judged as free and

fair by observers (Foreign Affairs). There has also been speculation that members of the National Transitional Council have attempted to “carve deals out of foreign direct investment contracts” (Tarkowski and Omar). The Libyan people are hopeful that the oil wealth of the country will translate into a higher standard of living for all Libyans. The new government will need to build the institutions and political structure that prevent corruption and make this possible. USAID states that the U.S. aid to Libya is given with the intention to “bolster the administrative capacities of interim governing authorities” and to improve the relationships between media and civic society organizations, between the government and the Libyan citizens, and to encourage “civic education and reconciliation” (USAID).

Under the Gaddafi government, political parties were banned, leaving little cultural understanding of a multi-party democratic system. Social loyalties, therefore, are seen to play a role in the government that is formed in the country. During the election of the General National Congress and the Parliamentary elections, Libyan citizens voted based not on political idealism, but on religious appeals, appeals based on opposition to the former government, and presumably for independent candidates based on respect in their respective communities and familial ties to these individuals. This pattern is somewhat parallel to what existed under the National Transitional Council. The council was critiqued as selecting members not based on merit but based on their level of suffering under the Gaddafi regime, on Islamic, Muslim Brotherhood ties, and on affiliation with certain families including the Bogaigis and the Garianis (Tarkowski and Omar).

The two main political parties of the General National Congress are the National

Forces Alliance (NFA) led by Mahmoud Jibril, and the Justice and Construction Party (JCP), a party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (Libya Elections). Not surprisingly, a substantial number of Libyan parliamentary candidates are independent citizens that are respected in their communities and have been hesitant to join main parties (Libya Elections). It has been speculated that the form of proportional representation that in part led to this congressional makeup will result in gridlock because individuals and parties will be hesitant to compromise (Foreign Affairs). On the other hand, power-grabs could result in ruling parties becoming authoritarian rulers, although this result seems less likely in Libya. More likely is the lack of representation and rights for minority groups that could result in continued violence.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS**

While important differences exist in the nature of tribalism in Iraq and Libya, their similarities provide basis of comparison. Libya and Iraq are both oil rich, urbanizing countries recently governed by Arab-nationalist socialist regimes. In these countries, tribal loyalties no longer have the institutional structure they once did, but still have prevalent societal influences. Historically, tribalism in both states contributed to the formation of political structures. Tribalism was largely oppressed in, but still utilized by the ideological Ba'athist regime in Iraq. It was similarly discouraged and utilized by the Third Universal Theory in Libya, where it was used by the *Jamahiriya* regime to gain tribal support through power-sharing agreements and clientelism. Both regimes'

socialist governments have now been overthrown with assistance from the United States and other Western forces.

Skeptics assert that tribal loyalties in Middle Eastern societies pose an insurmountable obstacle to the formation of a democratic state because tribal people make decisions based upon familial loyalties and not national good. In Iraq and Libya, these characteristics of tribalism pose potential challenges to state-formation including the potential for corruption and renewed tensions or civil war.

In Iraq, tribal alliances were used as a resource for countering insurgency, for increasing confidence of various tribes in the civic process, and for economic development. The successes and failures in Iraq can provide some insight into the actions that the U.S. should take in Libya. The U.S. must consider the nature of societal groups including tribes and how they affect the country's capacity to construct a successful democracy. Firstly, in order to maintain security the problem of tribalism that is manifest in disparate militias with competing interests must be addressed. The development of civic institutions and central government must also take into consideration different interests and must be successful in combating corruption in order to gain confidence from varied tribal groups and decrease the possibility of renewed conflict.

In Libya, the United States must consider the nature of the support that should be given that will be most successful in creating democracy within the context of a heterogeneous society with tribal aspects. The tribal loyalties existent in Libyan society combined with their lack of experience in representative democracy poses a substantial challenge to creating a successful state that is inclusive of all groups. While tribalism

does pose certain challenges to state formation in Libya, it does not necessarily preclude the possibility of state formation. Instead, tribes can be used as a resource to deal with these challenges by uniting militias into a national army and by building up civic society organizations and the administrative capacity of the government.

Understanding the political interests of tribes can help to overcome problems they may pose to democratic state-building. In the counterinsurgency model, tribal loyalties were used to encourage tribes to band together to provide collective security by appealing to sheiks and paying tribesmen. Libya's disparate militias must be recognized as a threat to state-formation and security and dealt with by professionalizing and centralizing the military. The central government should seek to reduce the arms held by these militias and formalize a structure to engage them. Appealing to tribal leadership and offering money or other resources could serve as a tool to disband militias and to recruit tribesmen into the national army. No one militia should predominate. The United States, or a NATO coalition should provide training to these forces. Police and military forces should be paid to provide security from the outset and, as the army is professionalized, should move toward a conscript system and avoid career service in order to avoid attempts to seize power.

The United States as part of a coalition of Western governments should provide advice and material aid to Libya to encourage representation of all tribal groups, to create successful legal institutions that properly administer justice, to build up the administrative capacity of the country, and to disband militias. As the country continues to modernize develop economically while and corruption is combated, seeking material gains for a tribe will become less necessary and a functioning democracy may be

allowed to emerge. Strong civic organizations that provide basic resources as well as transparency in wealth distribution will provide tribes with resources that encourage them to support the democratic transition.

The threat posed by ethnic, tribal, and sectarian divisions is most concrete and immediate on the military level but must also be addressed on a political level. The constitution and political organization of the government must be conducive to collaboration toward national interests and prevent certain groups from attempting to wrest power or privilege from the emerging system by undermining democratic principles. Democracy in Iraq is not yet fully functional and is still plagued by sectarian and tribal divisions and corruption. However, the United States has gained a measure of trust in its assistance in Iraq and has been able to advise on measures to continue to reform the governmental structures. As an example, the U.S. advised changing election procedures in order to better represent all of the country's regions and societal groups. Similarly, the U.S. should engage in trust-building measures and advisement in Libya.

The United States should seek to provide advice to the newly elected parliamentary leaders, who have expressed interest in democracy but have no experience of its practice. Protection of Tuareg, Tebu, Cynebian, and Tripolitanian tribes as well as black Africans must be established early on in order to prevent competitions for power. The constitution and government of Libya must be formed to represent the interests of all minority groups. In order to represent these interests, the General National Congress must not vilify tribes that were loyal to Gaddafi and must deal with them justly. The National Transitional Council has not proven to be entirely successful in terms of representing all interests and sharing power. However, it has demonstrated



interest in keeping peace and stability in the nation and has in general demonstrated efforts to do this, especially by turning over power to the General National Congress in the 2012 elections (Foreign Affairs).

Apart from constitution and government formation, the United States should pay attention to economic concerns within the country in order to improve prospects of stability. It should work within the International Monetary Fund and with other Western nations to ensure that the spending of governments is transparent and to reverse and prevent corruption to the greatest degree possible. The large oil revenues of Libya are sufficient to increase the standard of living within the country and decrease the levels of welfare disparity between various groups. Ultimately, this equality of distribution will be most successful in preventing tension and conflict. The U.S. should also provide funding for infrastructure and basic needs in the country where necessary. An adequate standard of living and lack of desperation will keep competition at bay.

### References

Arango, Tim. "Iraq Election Official's Arrest Casts Doubt on Prospect for Fair Voting."

*New York Times*, 16 April 2012. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/world/middleeast/iraq-arrest-calls-fair-elections-into-question.html? r=0>

Bates, Daniel G. and Amal Rassam. *Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East*. New

Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001. Print.

Blanchard, Christopher M. "Islam: Sunnis and Shiites" *Congressional Research Service*,

28 Jan. 2009. Web. 13 Nov. 2012. <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21745.pdf>

"Commander's Emergency Response Program." *United States Combined Arms Center*. 27

Sept. 2009. Web. 26 Nov. 2012. <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/09-27/ch-4.asp>

Gunter, Frank R. "Economic Development During Conflict: The Petraeus-Crocker

Congressional Testimonies." *Strategic Insights*, Dec. 2007. Web. November 13, 2012.

<http://www.lehigh.edu/~incbeug/Attachments/GunterEcoDevelDuringConflictDec07.pdf>

Friedman, Thomas L. "Tribes with Flags." *New York Times*, 22 March 2011. Web.

November 13, 2012.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/opinion/23friedman.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/opinion/23friedman.html?_r=0)

Galbraith, Peter W. *The End of Iraq*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006. Print.

Gritten, David. "Long path to Iraq's sectarian split." *BBC News*. 25 Feb. 2006. Web. 26

Nov. 2012. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4750320.stm>

Hassan, Hussein D. "Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities."

*Congressional Research Service*. 15 March 2007. Web. November 13, 2012.

<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/81928.pdf>

Hoeffler, Anke. "Dealing with the Consequences of Violent Conflicts in Africa."

*University of Oxford*. 13 March 2008. Web. November 13, 2012.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ball0144/consequences.pdf>

Hurewitz, J.C. *Middle East Politics, The Military Dimension*. New York: Praeger Publishers, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 1970. Print.

"Iraqis." *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life*. Ed. Timothy L. Gall and Jeneen Hobby. Vol. 3: Asia & Oceania. 2nd ed. Detroit: Gale, 2009. pp. 390-396. Web.

"Iraq" CIA World Factbook. *United States Central Intelligence Agency*. Web. 26 Nov. 2012. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html>

"Libya: Bani Walid siege must be lifted." *Amnesty International*. 5 Oct. 2012. Web. 27 Nov. 2012.

"Libya election success for secularist Jibril's bloc" *BBC News*. 18 July 2012. Web. 26 Nov. 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18880908>

Myers, Steven Lee. "In Turmoil, Sunni Party in Iraq Calls for Vote Boycott." *New York Times*, 20 Feb. 2010. Web. 13 Nov. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/world/middleeast/21iraq.html>

"Nuri Kamal al-Maliki." *New York Times*. 5 Sept. 2012. Web.

Otterman, Sharon. "IRAQ: The Role of Tribes." *Council on Foreign Relations*. November 14, 2003. Web. 13 Nov. 2012. <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/iraq-role-tribes/p7681>

Rassam, Amal. "Tribe." *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. Ed. Richard C. Martin. Vol. 2. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. pp. 699-700. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.

Salzman, Philip Carl. "The Middle East's Tribal DNA." *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2008, pp. 23-33. Web. November 13, 2012. <http://www.meforum.org/1813/the->

middle-east-tribal-dna

St. John, Ronald Bruce. *Historical Dictionary of Libya*. Maryland, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006. Print.

Stolzoff, Sam G. *The Iraqi Tribal System*. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

Tarkowski Tempelhof, Susanne, and Manal Omar. "Stakeholders of Libya's

February 17 Revolution." *US Institute for Peace*. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.

[http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR\\_300.pdf](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/SR_300.pdf)

Terrill, W. Andrew. *Lessons of the Iraqi De-Ba'athification Program for Iraq's Future and the Arab Revolutions*. Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2012. Print.

"Corruption Perceptions Index 2010." Transparency International, 2010. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

"Tribal ties tangle post-Qaddafi Libya" Wednesday, 15 Feb. 2012. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/02/15/194714.html>

"Tribalism." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Ed. William A. Darity, Jr. Vol. 8. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008. pp. 448-449. Web. 26 Nov. 2012.

*United States Counterinsurgency Guide*. U.S. Department of State. Jan. 2009. Web. 13 Nov. 2012. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>

Vandewalle, Dirk. *A History of Modern Libya*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Print.

---. "The New Libya." *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2012, pp 8-15. Print.

Yaphe, Judith O. "The Legacy of Iraq's Past and the Promise of Its Future." *The Middle East Enters the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Robert O. Freedman. Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2002. Print.