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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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To: H
Subject: Jeff update

Contrast between Benghazi and reports from the West: Here in Benghazi since Thursday, I have joined our representative, Chris Stevens, in meetings with a large number of representatives from the TNC, civil society, UN organizations and NGOs, and the diplomatic corps. While we had no idea that our trip would correspond with significant military advances in the east and the start of the coordinated Tripoli uprising dubbed "Operation Mermaid Dawn," the timing gave us the opportunity to note the contrast between the relative bureaucratic quiet here compared to hyped-up activity in western Libya. Clearly, some coordination is underway between Benghazi and the west: Ali Tarhouni, recently promoted to Deputy Prime Minister in a still-to-be-completed cabinet reshuffle, previewed the Tripoli uprising with us, down almost to the minute. Yet one feels that, to a large extent, TNC officials are observers and chroniclers rather than the authors of the unfolding developments to the west. (In a telling anecdote, just after confiding in us the plans for Tripoli about to unfold, Tarhouni turned off his ringing cell phone, to concentrate on talking to us in a leisurely manner.) What TNC officials told us to a large extent was sensible and mostly reassuring in its content -- and the TNC just issued a directive reiterating its policy to treat combatants according to the Geneva conventions and observe human rights -- but their comments fell mostly in the category of passive analysis rather than aggressive forward thinking. Washington has task forces in focused on Tripoli; Benghazi does not.

While there's a sense in the air that the final battles have begun, that palpable anticipation does not seem to have translated into the type of stepped-up bureaucratic activity that one would expect. After meeting with us for nearly two hours on Thursday, TNC Executive Committee chair (and PM-equivalent) Mahmoud Jibril returned to Doha rather than head any kind of war room here. I was on the ground far longer than Jibril, giving another cameo appearance here. Tarhouni confided that there is no plan for when or how the TNC would relocate quickly to Tripoli, should Tripoli fall. TNC Chairman Mustafa Abduljalil (who remains by all accounts a unifying figure here) is a humble, retiring leader, which after Qadhafi's flamboyance is part of the attraction for Libyans but which does not make him naturally think of how to project TNC authority and symbolism quickly to the newly liberated areas. The question is, when Tripoli falls, do the extensive plans that the TNC has made about the post-Qadhafi transitional structures have any relevance for Tripoli? I do not want to overplay this: the flags being raised in the western towns are the flags used here. Our visit to the military command center demonstrated that there is active information flow (if not exactly command and control) passing between east and west. Tarhouni and others who visit western towns, usually from Tunis, describe support there and from tribal leaders across Libya. No other groups are claiming to have established or planned for an alternative civilian authority to compete with the TNC. Still, in our engagement with TNC officials, we will need to remind them continually of the imperative to nurture their legitimacy and authority and to prevent a political vacuum that others could fill -- especially after Tripoli falls and the TNC is here, not there.

We've talked a lot about Tripoli and whether a battle for the capital could be avoided, which we argued would be the best solution. One of the TNC's assets is the moral distinction between what the Libya that the TNC aspires to promote and how Qadhafi has treated Libya's citizens. The world's attention will focus on a battle for Tripoli, we cautioned, and acts of brutality and revenge and potential internal fights among competing militias will blur that moral distinction even more than the assassination of TNC Chief of Staff Abdulfatah Younis already did. The damage to the TNC's credibility could be irreparable. We also noted that a TNC-led negotiation that succeeds in winning Tripoli without a fight would underscore the TNC leadership far more dramatically than a successful militia assault only vaguely connected to the Benghazi leadership. The TNC officials heard us out patiently, but they clearly were not in the mood to negotiate. They feel confident about the current military situation, and they remain convinced that Qadhafi simply will not give up no matter how high the pressure. If anything, their positions have hardened in recent weeks, with Abduljalil telling us that the TNC will no longer contemplate Qadhafi staying in Libya once he is out of power. Saif Qadhafi is seen in the same category as his father. I do not believe that anything short of a significant change -- Qadhafi's departure, a military

setback that punctures the TNC's current confidence, NATO insisting on a pause in operations in favor of negotiations -- will persuade the TNC leadership that it is in their interest right now to offer Qadhafi a peaceful way out. Tarhouni also acknowledged with his trademark candor that, to the Libyan people right now, negotiations would appear weak and not a satisfactory climax to the revolution. They do have a point that, despite signs of desperation around Qadhafi (e.g., Mohammed Ismail's multiple attempts to contact Gene Cretz and me), there is no indication that Qadhafi himself is prepared to throw in the towel. There is real fear that, should Qadhafi somehow make it from Tripoli to Sebha, a guerilla war could persist for years, with supplies and mercenaries smuggled across the Saharan border.

Among other topics, we pushed the TNC officials hard on starting a high-profile discussion immediately on the reconciliation which is part of the TNC's platform. We noted that the many victims of Qadhafi's 42-year rule will be less likely to pursue individual acts of revenge if they are assured that there will be some form to address grievances through rule-of-law accountability. The same message should also appeal to average Libyans who for whatever reason remained as part of Qadhafi's regime to the end but who have no blood on their hands and might otherwise fear retribution. TNC officials refer approvingly to the South African and Moroccan models, and they reiterated their commitment for an inclusive process for Libya's future that welcomes all but the most notorious individuals around Qadhafi. Yet they still seem to rely largely on (variously described) luck, tribal discipline, and the "gentle character" of the Libyan people as the best assurances against abuse and revenge killings. We will continue to push on this.

Benghazi remained full of chatter about the Abdulfatah Younis assassination. With tribal visits and investigation committees and cabinet changes, the TNC addressed the immediate crisis sufficiently effectively that the initial tension and gunfire quickly dissipated. But the assassination highlighted two realities of Libyan life that TNC officials had previously tried to downplay: tribes and militias. Rather than denying the tribal affiliations of Libyans, TNC officials are now looking to the tribes as part of the solution in enforcing discipline and preventing the type of widescale looting and pillaging that destroyed Benghazi's security infrastructure in March. Tribes, we heard, can also be a corrective balance to Islamist leanings. On reining in the militias, we heard no good answers. Some people (Tarhouni, TNC National Security Advisor Bazama, some civil society representatives) spoke frankly about the problem, including the Islamist leanings of the most powerful. The Islamist militias deserve more discussion in other channels, but a couple of people noted that the Younis assassination had an upside in making scrutiny of this issue imperative. Others seemed to rely, again, on luck or tried to avert their eyes from the problem that militias could post on the Day After. There was widespread disdain for Qatar's role in encouraging certain militia elements, and I will be able to cite lots of concern here when I go to Doha later. Qatar's role, too, is a subject better discussed elsewhere.

We also discussed humanitarian and financial needs. Tarhouni and Jibril noted that the TNC's financial needs increase as more territory falls under rebel control; they are worried that, if they can't provide electricity to newly liberated towns or fund other services there, disenchantment with the TNC will grow. Tarhouni agreed to reach out to the Indians to discuss Libya's outstanding debts, to see if he can help us get India's hold on the frozen asset proposal lifted. Briefed on South Africa's objections, Jibril understood the need for continued outreach to Africa (although part of our South Africa problem may derive from Jibril's poor relations with Zuma, with Jibril telling us that he recently accused Zuma of making Nelson Mandela feel ashamed); Abdulrahman Shalgam will go to the August 25-26 AU Summit and Jibril did not rule out attending himself. I've spoken several times to UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed since arriving here, and the UAE has finally responded positively to our soft collateral proposal for a loan to the TNC, which may be our fastest way of getting funds here, assuming we can come up with a letter that meets the UAE's needs and passes the scrutiny of the U.S. interagency process.

My traveling companions, Bill Roebuck (NEA/MAG director) and Ben Fishman from the NSS, start their return trip today. I will go on to Cairo, Doha, and Abu Dhabi, where, inter alia, I will have more Libya discussions, including seeing Jibril again in Doha. With NileSat continuing to broadcast Qadhafi's propaganda, the Libyan anger over Egypt's role approaches if not exceeds annoyance with Qataar. We are also checking on how to get from Cairo back here, should I need to join Chris here in the coming days.

Chris and his tiny staff are doing a heroic job in representing our interests here. I am especially appreciative to DS for all the work done to support my trip. I also want to highlight the work that Pat Kennedy's M family and NEA/EX did in establishing living and working quarters for Chris and his team. Thanks to a lot of creativity and hard work, the

environment for American staff here is significantly improved over what I saw two months ago when we were located in the downtown Tibesty Hotel.

-- Jeff