

LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1951-1959:
THE DECADE OF WEAKNESS

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To the spirit of my pure mother who died while waiting for this moment.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Libyan-American relations from 1951 until 1969, the period from independence until the rise of the regime of Muammar Qaddafi. It draws on research in archival collections at the U.S. National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, in addition to oral histories conducted specifically for this study. Using these collections as well as secondary sources in both English and Arabic, the dissertation examines a time period that has been purposefully ignored in Libya and a subject that has received little academic attention.

It argues that as Libya emerged from colonial rule under Italy, it faced great difficulties in attaining its diplomatic goals of attaining independence and improving the lives of its citizens. Ultimately, under the overall leadership of King Idris Sanusi, Libya did gain its independence, but that independence required advance concessions to both the United States and the United Kingdom to maintain military bases in the country that had been established during the Second World War. Once independent, Libya continued to struggle to define itself and its place in the world. As negotiations about permanent base agreements dragged in the early independence period, Libyan Prime Minister Mahmoud Muntasir skillfully used concerns about national sovereignty voiced by the Libyan parliament to delay and improve the base deal. He, and his successor—Mustafa Bin Halim—also sought to play British and American interests off one another as well as

to use Cold War anxieties about the Soviet Union to improve the level of aid provided to the new nation. In these ways, the Libyan government, despite its real weaknesses, played its hand well in the international arena. The discovery of oil began to fundamentally shift the calculus of the relations between Libya and the United States in the late 1950s, but those who have characterized the Sanusi regime as puppets of the Western states have fundamentally misunderstood the very real constraints and the excellent statecraft displayed by this new government. Ultimately, it is my hope that learning this history will empower the Libyan people, which is the focus chapter five.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LIBYAN- AMERICAN RELATIONS	26
The Libyan-American War and Relations in the Nineteenth Century.....	31
The Second World War and U.S. Involvement in Libya.....	38
The U.S. Position after the War	45
The Potsdam Conference, July 17-August 2, 1945.....	49
The U.S. Position through the Council of Foreign Ministers.....	51
The U.S. Position in the United Nations	59
The U.S. Attitude toward Political Developments in Libya.....	66
CHAPTER III: LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1951-1954.....	73
Bilateral Military Treaties: The Temporary Agreement of December 1951.....	73
Deliberations toward the Wheelus Field Agreement of 1954 ...	86
Wheelus Field	110
The Military Assistance Agreement of 1957	119

CHAPTER IV: EVALUATION OF LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS,	
1955-1959	123
Point Four Program	123
U.S. Position on Libyan-Soviet Relations in 1955.....	127
Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957.....	133
An Evaluation of U.S interests, 1957-1959	138
U.S. Aid Channels	149
Egyptian Influence	153
Discovery of Oil	161
CHAPTER V: LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, PUBLIC HISTORY,	
AND ORAL HISTORY	168
The History of Oral History	169
Oral History Project	175
Assessment of Libyan CLAS Experience.....	190
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.....	196
BIBLIOGRAPHY	200

LIST OF FIGURES

	PAGE
Figure 1: Libyan Map including Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan	27
Figure 2: Military Operations in Libya during World War II	39
Figure 3: Wheelus Field Map	114
Figure 4: Assigned Personnel at Wheelus	116
Figure 5: U.S. Commitments to Libya under Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957 ...	138
Figure 6: Allocations to LRAC by Sectors	151
Figure 7: Seventeen Oral History Research Areas Based on Language and Culture	172
Figure 8: Bannon's Pledge Issued by His School on February 2, 1967	182

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

Libyan-American relations are an exceptional case when viewed within the overall frame of U.S.-Middle Eastern relations, primarily because of the unique circumstances that followed World War II and its aftermath, especially as the Cold War started. Not only the time period but also the history of Libya gave these relations their special character. Additionally, this relationship and the history of it has been colored by the 1969 coup when General Muamar Gaddafi took over authority in Libya. He specifically aimed to distort the history of the preceding monarchical period in order to market himself and his ideology, which was influenced heavily by the Pan-Arab propaganda flowing from Gamal Nasser's Egypt. Gaddafi's revolution generated aggressive criticism against anything related to the monarchy, branding the king and his government as pro-Western puppets. This aggression carried over to the generations after 1969 and into the historiography on both the monarchy and Libyan-American relations. Professional historians in Libya avoided study of the period altogether, and the public became largely convinced by the official government line of hostility against both the previous Libyan leadership and the United States. With the fall of the Gaddafi regime, a reassessment of this political history became possible, and the challenges facing the Libyan people now make recovering this history essential to their future.

Due to the neglect of this subject and time period as well as the lack of academic freedom in Libya, I was motivated to re-explore Libyan-American relations, which was challenging given the deliberate ignoring and distorting of this subject in both written and oral histories. Subsequently, the dissertation seeks to correct some of the distortions and fill in some of the voids in the historical record. Additionally, it examines how oral histories done since the end of the Gaddafi regime can help to inform the current generation of Libyans and can provide guidance for their future. So, Libyan-American relations should be re-examined to realize, clarify, and correct the reality of those relations based on truth, paving the way for public history to engage people with this history and to correct the national memory (or collective amnesia) of the country.

The historiography of Libyan-American relations can be divided into two types: Libyan-American relations within the context of the United States' relations with the Middle East generally and Libyan-American relations specifically. In general, the connections to the historical literature on the Middle East tend to be weak, due in part to disagreement about whether Libya is best explained within this context or within the context of North Africa. Therefore, Libya sometimes is missed or neglected in this larger geographical context.

When examining Libyan relations within the larger regional context, one of the most frequently used lenses in recent studies of U.S. relations with the Middle East since 1945 is orientalism. American orientalism refers to a Western way of seeing Eastern or Middle Eastern societies (including Asia and North Africa) as exotic, backward, and uncivilized. This idea has played a crucial role in shaping U.S. foreign policy toward

Middle East societies in general and toward Libya in particular. American orientalism, especially after World War II, was shaped by the German Holocaust of Eastern European Jews and the subsequent postwar creation of the Jewish state of Israel. These two events helped to diminish traditional, Western anti-Semitism by “Westernizing” Jews, while Arabs and Muslims were simultaneously demonized as anti-Western. The issue of American orientalism and its specific impact on U.S. foreign policy is difficult to specify and has attracted few historians who are able to establish exact links between these ideas and their effect on U.S. foreign policy. Historian Douglas Little’s *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* is one of the few to tackle the issue directly. He examines the topic historically, showing how the “Middle East,” is an oriental idea, developed in American minds, and how this stereotype influenced U.S. policymakers toward the Middle East. He deals with American orientalism from different angles to demonstrate its effects on U.S. policy throughout the last half century, culminating in the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. He explains U.S. efforts in the region as part of the “white man’s burden”¹ to modernize and reform the Middle East by using some illustrative case studies, including Iraq, Libya, and Iran. With regard of Libya, he examines U.S. efforts in Libya to encourage King Idris Sanusi,

¹ The phrase originally came from a poem written for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee by the English poet Rudyard Kipling and then was held by some Europeans to mean they had a duty that put themselves in charge of caring for all the other “inferior” races on the earth. It was a primary European justification of imperialism that it would bring civilization, modernity, and wealth to all peoples of the world. Its different interpretations were often linked to ideology and included one that reflected the subject of American colonization in the Philippines. See Urban Dictionary, “White Man’s Burden,” <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=white%20man's%20burden> (accessed 10/17/2014).

first king of the United Kingdom of Libya (1951-1969), to modernize his regime, especially after the discovery of oil in the late 1950s.²

This orientalism toward Libya after the Second World War can be seen, for example, in the report of the Commission of Investigation sent to Libya by the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM), a body of representatives from Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States that became responsible for administration of the former Italian colonies. It described the Libyans as “backward, childlike, and immature in their understanding of the responsibilities of independence.” Benjamin Rivlin, a Harvard University professor of political science and former employee of both the U.S. State Department and the United Nations, also reflected this orientalist notion in his presumably academic article about Libya. He depicted Libyans as a “predominantly backward and illiterate people. . . . politically unsophisticated, unorganized and inarticulate.”³ American orientalism in general and toward Middle East in particular is a hard topic to pin down and determine its exact relation to policymakers and their subsequent foreign policy. Therefore, it has not commonly received much attention in the historiography. Naomi Rosenblatt tries to distinguish between American and European orientalism to better understand the U.S. version. She explains political reasons, like America’s isolationist foreign policy in the nineteenth century, meant European orientalism was both more extensive and earlier. She relies on Edward Said’s

² Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 206-14.

³ As quoted in Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 8; Benjamin Rivlin, “Unity and Nationalism in Libya,” *Middle East Journal* 3, no. 1 (January 1949): 31-44.

definition of British and French orientalism in the eighteenth century to interrogate American orientalism.⁴

Despite a great scholarly and popular interest in the history of U.S. relations toward the Middle East generally, the historiography of Libyan-American relations is very limited, especially for the monarchical period (1951-1969). Additionally, much of what has been written about Libyan foreign policy is distorted by characterizations of these leaders of modern Libya as puppets to the West, negating their patriotism and nationalism; this interpretation seemingly ignores the context of Libyan political developments after independence, especially the general weakness of the new nation-state. Despite the general neglect, U.S. foreign policy toward Libya is an integral part of its regional foreign policy. Many of the main engines that drove the United States' policy toward the whole region, especially in the context of the Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s, also apply to Libya.

There are many studies that have shaped the historiography on American relations with the Middle East, including Libya. Understanding U.S. relations with neighboring countries, especially Egypt, is key, because that nation greatly influenced Libyan foreign policy toward the West. In particular the anti-Western attitudes heralded by Egypt's second president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who became a controversial leader of the Arab world, fueled the West's policies toward the Middle East. He engaged in two wars against Israel in 1956 and 1967, nationalized the Suez Canal, and liquidated the British

⁴ Naomi Rosenblatt, "Orientalism in American Popular Culture," *Penn History Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 51-63; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

presence in the country. He was keen to rid the region of its monarchical governments, which often had good relations with the West. Historian Peter Hahn's *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* explores and analyzes U.S. foreign policy during this crucial period. He examines the strategic, political, and economic interests that shaped American policy toward Egypt, especially during the Suez Crisis.⁵ He chronicles growing U.S. involvement in the region and the concomitant decline of the British presence in Egypt, especially after the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Hahn also pays attention to the growing nationalism that spread rapidly across the region and the ways that it affected Middle Eastern countries, especially Libya, after 1955.⁶

As Hahn's book illustrates, Anglo-American relations had a direct impact on the Middle East, and this was certainly the case with Libya. Specifically during the time period under study, the declining British role in the region—paired with growing U.S. ascendancy under the rubric of decolonization—was a key dynamic in the two powers' relations in this area. This competition was obvious, especially after the Suez Crisis and the discovery of oil in Libya in the late 1950s, which was dominated by U.S. companies.

⁵ The Suez Crisis or Suez Canal Crisis is generally known in the Arab world as the Tripartite Aggression; it was the armed invasion of Egypt in late 1956 by Israel, followed by Britain and France, aiming to regain their control over the Suez Canal, which had been nationalized by Nasser, and to remove him from power. The crisis strained Western-Middle Eastern relations. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations worked together diplomatically to compel Britain, Israel, and France into a cease-fire followed by a complete withdrawal of their forces. See Salim Yaquub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 23-55.

⁶ Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

Historian Nigel John Ashton's *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser* examines these relations in the context of the Middle East, explaining the effect of Arab nationalism and its role in the decline of the British presence in the region. He also examines how U.S. policy, despite any differences in style or history, shared the same British policy goals of protecting the region from Soviet penetration and preserving Western access to the region's oil resources. He explains that the shifting relative positions within the Anglo-American alliance were based on priorities. For the British, the security of the Persian Gulf's oil was most important, while for the United States, the Soviet threat was paramount; so each country developed its policy based on its primary priority, but without damaging their shared goals in the region.⁷ Journalist and consultant Stephen Blackwell examines Anglo-American collaboration in Libya following the Suez Crisis to preserve the rule of King Idris and stabilize the country, which both considered to be in their interests. Blackwell's article focuses on British attempts, with American support, to use its military forces in Libya to bolster the regime of King Idris against the upheavals created by the Suez Crisis in 1956 and the Iraqi revolution in 1958. Both London and Washington saw Libya as an essential link in their plans to defend the Middle East. On the other hand, David A. Nichols's *Eisenhower 1956* explores, in chapter five, Nasser's goals to overthrow the Libyan monarchy, damage the Baghdad Pact,⁸ overthrow the ruler of Iraq, and establish Arab republics in Tunisia, Algeria, and

⁷ Nigel John Ashton, *Eisenhower, Macmillan, and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955-1959* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

⁸ The United States and United Kingdom advocated the creation of the Baghdad Pact in February 1955 as a pro-Western defense alliance (it consisted of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom) with the Cold War goal of protecting the Middle

Morocco. This “anti-monarchical policy” was fully supported by the Soviet Union. Eisenhower’s concern about Nasser’s intentions shaped the American President’s thinking about the need to prevent the infiltration of Communism into the region after the Suez Crisis.⁹

Anglo-American rivalries over oil in the Middle East were reflected in their respective foreign policies toward the region throughout the twentieth century in general and toward Libya in particular. In this context, senior State Department Middle East analyst Steven G. Galpern’s *Money, Oil, and Empire in the Middle East: Sterling and Postwar Imperialism, 1944-1971* examines Anglo-American competition after World War II, specifically exploring the disputes between Britain and the United States over Britain’s defense of its right to discriminate against oil imports from U.S. multinational petroleum firms. He examines London and Washington’s policy toward nationalism in Egypt and Iran, which exacerbated Anglo-American competition over Iran in 1953-1954. In regard to Libya, Nikolai Broshen, a Russian historian, explores how the United States competed with Britain over Libyan oil, which was first discovered by the Esso Company in 1959. As a result, American companies controlled over ninety percent of Libyan production. He explains that U.S. involvement in Libya after independence resulted in

East from Soviet influence. “Baghdad Pact,” *International Organization* 10, no. 1 (February 1956): 212-13.

⁹ Stephen Blackwell, “Saving the King: Anglo-American Strategy and British Counter-Subversion Operations in Libya, 1953-59,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (January 2003): 1-18; David A. Nichols, *Eisenhower 1956: The President’s Year of Crisis: Suez and the Brink of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

the Wheelus Field Base Agreement, a twenty-year military agreement signed in 1957 that signaled Libya's acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine¹⁰ and U.S. aid.¹¹

In the wake of the Suez Crisis, containment of Communism became a priority for both Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, who believed that Britain's humiliation had created a "vacuum" in the region that the Soviet Union, of course, would fill unless the United States took action. Historian Salim Yaqub's *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* focuses deeply on the Eisenhower Doctrine and the U.S. motivations behind it. He explains that Eisenhower's aims were mainly to protect U.S. interests in the region by increasing economic and military aid for Middle Eastern countries to protect the region from Soviet encroachment. Significantly, American policymakers counted Egypt and Syria as agents of Soviet influence, since both had already concluded military and economic agreements with the Soviet bloc. Yaqub concentrates on the first two years of the doctrine (1957-1958), covering its origins and the mission of James Richards, Eisenhower's special ambassador for Eisenhower Doctrine, who visited the Middle Eastern and North African countries to see and judge their respective positions. Nations categorized as conservative Arab regimes—such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Libya—were to receive

¹⁰ Enunciated in Eisenhower's speech before Congress requesting approval of financial support to protect the Middle East from Communism by extending military and economic aid to any country in the region needing help in response to Soviet influence.

¹¹ Steven G. Galpern, *Money, Oil, and Empire in the Middle East: Sterling and Postwar Imperialism, 1944-1971* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Nikolai Broshen, *Tarekh Libya Min Nehayat El Karen Tasa Asher Hata 1969* [History of Libya since the late 19th century through 1969], translated from Russian to Arabic by Emad Hatim (Tripoli, Libya: Center for Libyan Archives and Historical Studies, 1988), 327-471.

economic and military aid to encourage them to side openly with the West during the Cold War, which would potentially isolate Nasser. Yaqub examines Middle Eastern countries' reaction to the doctrine, including Libya's welcome of American economic aid. Similarly, Ahmed Abdel-Raheem Mustafa also examines, in chapter four, the Eisenhower Doctrine and reactions in the region. He also argues that the end of the British role in the region after the Suez Crisis resulted in the U.S. role expanding to fill the "vacuum" in the region and to preclude greater Soviet involvement. He also explores Richards's mission to Middle East and why this mission was not more successful. Majid Khadduri's *Modern Libya: A Study in Political Development* examines the doctrine within the specific context of Libya, describing the Richards's mission conversations with Libyan officials and exploring Libyan reactions through daily newspapers (most of which took a Nasserist line), which criticized the government for accepting the American doctrine.¹²

Despite the common historical strands noted above, U.S. involvement in Libya has been slightly different from its involvement in the Middle East generally during the same period. U.S. involvement in Libya, like other Arab countries (including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan) after the Second World War, was driven by its desire to protect against Soviet penetration in the area, both by building military bases and by maintaining close relations with the Libyan government. But the difference comes in that U.S.

¹² Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*; Ahmed Abdel-Raheem Mustafa, *El-Welayat El-Motahida Wa Mashreq El-Arabi* [the United States and the Levant] (Kuwait City: National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters, 1978), 117-58; Majid Khadduri, *Modern Libya: A Study in Political Development* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963), 280-89.

economic motivations in Libya did not play any role until the discovery of oil in the country in 1959. As a counter-example, U.S. economic motivations had been the main engine since the early twentieth century in shaping American policy toward Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states, and Iraq.

John A. DeNovo's *American Interests and Politics in the Middle East, 1900-1939* defines the U.S. presence in the Middle East throughout the nineteenth century as being largely cultural and religious. The primary agents of this influence were American missionaries starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing throughout the nineteenth century. For example, Robert College in Constantinople opened in 1863, Syrian Protestant College in Beirut was established in 1866 (which became known as the American University of Beirut), and the American University of Cairo opened in 1919. The region also saw the establishment of Western-funded primary and secondary schools and hospitals, and scholars from Europe and North America in a variety of different fields also traveled to visit and study the Middle East. But all of this was something that Libya experienced far less than other countries in the region.¹³

Within the larger study of U.S. relations with the Middle East, there are very few studies that focus exclusively on Libyan-American relations. The few studies that have dealt with the topic directly are primarily in Arabic and were published after 1969. However, these studies tend to ignore Libyan foreign policy toward the West, while emphasizing Western foreign policy toward Libya, which makes their conclusions suspect as they ignore half of this bilateral relationship. As a result, they do not analyze

¹³ John A. DeNovo, *American Interests and Politics in the Middle East, 1900-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963), 3-26, 383-94.

the domestic political factors that generated Libyan foreign policy toward the West and therefore tend to ignore the realities of Libya as a new country that needed to interact in world politics in a manner that would allow it to maintain and prove its independence among the family of nations. Additionally, a majority of the works on Libyan-American relations—especially those by Egyptian historians—were overwhelmingly influenced by Arab nationalism and the anti-Westernism that dominated in the region during the 1950s and 1960s especially. Therefore, their arguments on Libyan relations with the West in general and with the United States in particular tend to blame and criticize Libyan policy while neglecting the reality of Libyan politics on the ground. As a result of that, the historiography in Arabic on Libyan-American relations has been distorted and less than objective in historical terms. For example, a book-length study in Arabic that directly studies the topic of the monarchical period is Kadem Kahlan Elkessee's *Al Seeyasah Al Americiah Tejah Libya, 1949-1957*.¹⁴ He examines U.S. foreign policy toward Libya in the monarchical period, but only until 1957 when oil was discovered in Libya, which played a crucial role in changing Libyan foreign policy during the 1960s. The discovery of oil shifted Libya from the poorest country in the region that relied economically on foreign assistance throughout the 1950s to becoming a rich state very quickly. Then it could dispense with foreign aid and shape its own foreign policy without foreign influence. *Libya El Moasirah* by Salah El Aqad similarly deals with Libyan-American relations from an Arab nationalist perspective. He argues in the fourth section that

¹⁴ Kadem Kahlan Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Al Americiah Tejah Libya, 1949-1957* [American policy toward Libya, 1949-1957] (Tripoli, Libya: Markz Jihad Elibien Lelderat Eltarikhiyah, 2003).

Libyan policymakers intentionally chose to join the Western orbit rather than to side with Arab nationalism. He condemns this choice, ignoring the political reality of Libya as a new, weak state that needed help to maintain its independence and build its economy.¹⁵

There are a number of works that examine Libyan-American relations as part of a larger work, most often on the internal political developments in Libya during the 1950s and the 1960s. For example, the seminal work of Majid Khadduri, *Modern Libya: A Study in Political Development*, examines in the ninth chapter the foreign aid and treaties Libya negotiated with other nations, including the United States. He argues that Libyan foreign policy toward the West in general and the United States specifically sought primarily to maintain its independence but also to cultivate friendship and shared interests with the West, as these countries had supported King Idris in liberating Libya from Italian colonization and establishing its independence. In making this argument, Khadduri does not ignore the fact that the West did this for its own interests and that the great powers sometimes conflicted with one another about the Libyan issue, which eventually obliged them to put the Libyan question before the United Nations. He explains in short the reality of Libyan foreign policy that led its policymakers to seek close relations with the United States by allowing it to build military bases and by sometimes siding with the U.S. in its Middle East policy, such as Libya's welcome of the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957. As such, although foreign policy is not the focus of

¹⁵ Salah El Aqad, *Libya El Moasirah* [contemporary Libya] (Cairo, Egypt: Arab League, Institute of Arab Research and Studies, 1970), 115-20.

Khadduri's study, he dealt with the subject more objectively than many of the Arabic studies of the same period.¹⁶

In a variety of Arabic works influenced by Nasserism, Libyan-American relations become a byword for U.S. imperialism and are harshly criticized by these literary writers, amateur historians, and governmental organs, especially after 1969 with the Gaddafi regime's ascent to power. For example, the politicized work *Haqeqat Idris: Watheaq Wa Sowar* by the Libyan Administration for Revolutionary Guidance attacks King Idris vehemently. It argues that the king backed the British government in order to advance his own personal interests and authority over Libya, all while hiding behind a veil of religion. It characterizes Libya's 1951 independence as a false independence only delivered at the price of foreign bases provided to the United States and Britain.¹⁷ Such an account drastically overestimated the possibilities open to the new nation and sought to degrade King Idris on all levels, especially his foreign policy toward the Western nations. The purpose of this distorted political history of Libya was to make Gaddafi's policies, by comparison, seem superior. A similar focus on isolating and demonizing the monarchical period from the rest of Libyan history continued throughout the regime's rule.

There are also studies of Libyan-American relations as part of larger works that also fall within the Nasserite school, with its anti-Western and Pan-Arabist angle. We see examples of this type in the works of Sami Al Hakim, an Egyptian journalist and author,

¹⁶ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*.

¹⁷ Administration for Revolutionary Guidance, *Haqeqat Idris: Watheaq Wa Sowar* [Idris's truth: documents and pictures] (Tripoli, Libya: Public Institution Press, 1983).

who harshly criticizes the Libyan monarchy and king, who is described as an agent and puppet of the West. For instance, Al Hakim, in his last book published after the Gaddafi revolution in 1970, depicts the monarchy as a repressive and reactionary regime that sided with the West against Libyans' interests. Works like this, which represent the Nasserite school within the historiography, ignore any realistic assessment of the Libyan political and international situation in favor of its own ideological propaganda of anti-Western Nasserism that criticizes any conservative leaders—including King Hussein of Jordan and King Saud of Saudi Arabia—who had stable relations with the West.¹⁸

Another interpretation that flows from a specific ideology but from a different direction is the work of Nikolie Broshen, a Soviet historian, who dealt with the topic as part of his book-length history of Libya, *Tarekh Libya Min Nehayat El Karen Tasa Asher Hata 1969*. He sharply criticizes Libyan foreign-policymakers for pursuing friendship with the United States and Britain. He scornfully criticizes Libyan-American relations, describing them as a kind of a new colonization more rather than relations between two independent states. His critical assessment is based primarily on his analysis of the agreement to establish Wheelus Air Field and Base, which leads him to overestimate the warmth of Libyan-Western relations. Broshen also ignored Libyan foreign policy toward the West after the discovery of oil and its efforts to end the leases on the military bases in the 1960s. The author clearly is influenced by the Cold War, as the Soviet Union rejected

¹⁸ Sami Al Hakim, *Ha Dehi Libya* [This is Libya] (Cairo, Egypt: Anglo Library, 1965); idem, *Istiqlal Libya* [Independence of Libya] (Cairo, Egypt: Anglo Library, 1968); idem, *Haqiqat Libya* [Libya's truth] (Cairo, Egypt: Anglo Library, 1970); idem, *Muahadat Libya Maa Britannia WA Amrikah* [Libyan agreements with Britain and the United States] (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Elmarifa, 1964).

any Western involvement in Libya. The translation into Arabic by the Libyan government shows that this work was also compatible with the predominance of the Nasserite school and the Gaddafi regime's interpretations, which degraded everything that came from the West.¹⁹

Although the historiography on Libyan-American relations is generally lacking and has been subject to political interpretations, there are some exceptions written by Libyan refugees (opponents of Gaddafi regime who have lived for the last forty years in Europe and the United States). They represent what I have termed the "skeptical school" on Libya's relations with the West. The authors of this school have been influenced by their opposition to the Gaddafi regime and their support of the king, despite their criticism of Libyan officials throughout the monarchy. The skeptical school argues that the United States and Britain were behind the Libyan revolution of 1969 and that their activities, rather than solely the actions of Gaddafi, were responsible for ousting the king. It therefore investigates the causes of the revolution that ended the authority of the king and replaced it with authoritarian rule. The skeptical argument rests primarily on analyzing and exploring political and military activities in the 1960s through the archives in Britain and the United States. Although they do not have sufficient evidence to support this thesis so far, Mohamed Yousif Al Magariaf, who may be considered the

¹⁹ Broshen, *Tarekh Libya Min Nehayat El Karen Tasa Asher Hata 1969* [history of Libya since the end of nineteenth century until 1969] (Tripoli, Libya: Center for Libyan Archives and Historical Studies, 1988).

founder of this school, has written several works in this vein in the past decade.²⁰ For example, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wa'l-Hader: Safhat Min Al-Tarikh Al Siyasi* discusses political developments in Libya during the monarchical period in four solid volumes. Al Magariaf was an eyewitness to some of the events that occurred in the late 1960s when he was a university student in Benghazi, Libya. In this larger work, he touches upon Libyan-American relations. For example, he details the negotiations undertaken by Abdel Majed Kabbar, Prime Minister in early 1960s, whose tenure marked the beginning of changes in Libyan foreign policy toward the United States after the discovery of oil. The discovery of oil changed Libya's economic situation completely, a transformation that allowed its foreign-policymakers to consider liquidating foreign bases and rejecting the corresponding Anglo-American foreign aid. The skeptical school also tries to reveal the Nasserite role in supporting Gaddafi's revolution against the monarchy due to the Egyptian desire to be rid of conservative leaders in the Middle East who were associated with friendly relations with the West. These scholars are also trying to understand what they see as a hidden link between Nasser and Gaddafi, especially given Nasser's public welcome of the revolution as well as his military support of it in the early days of the revolution.²¹

²⁰ Mohamed Yousif Al Magariaf, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wa'l-Hader: Safhat Min Al-Tarikh Al Siyasi* [Libya between past and present: pages from political history], 4 vols. (Cairo, Egypt: Wahba Book Shop, 2000-7).

²¹ Mohamed Yousif Al Magariaf, *Inqilab Al-Qaddafi: Al-Himaya Al-Nasiriya* [The Qaddafi coup: the Nasserite protection] (Oxford: Center for Libyan Studies, 2011); idem, *Inqilab Bekyadat Mokhber* [A coup led by informant] (Oxford: Center for Libyan Studies, 2009); special issue of *Al-Inqad* [The magazine of the national front for the salvation of Libya] 16, no. 47 (September 1998): 16-159.

Other published studies touch on the topic of Libya after the Second World War with a focus on political developments in the Italians' former colonies (including Libya), especially through the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) and the United Nations General Assembly. These studies demonstrate how World War II involved the United States in Libya. For example, Scott Bill's seminal work, *The Libyan Arena: The United States, Britain, and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945-1948*, examines the Libyan question before the CFM and how this issue shaped Anglo-American plans for North Africa and the Middle East, especially as they encountered Soviet attempts to play a larger role in the region. In the same context, historian William Roger Louis examines British strategic rights in Cyrenaica and how these influenced London's position in the CFM toward the Libyan question within the context of its larger effort to safeguard its interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Louis also evaluates fluctuating American policy and Anglo-American plans to create Libya as an independent political entity to order to guarantee their military interests and to prevent Soviet involvement in Libya and the region as a whole. C. Grove Haines also examines the Libyan question as part of the postwar and CFM conferences, placing the question of the Italian colonies into the context of the transition from great power rivalry to Cold War rivalries. Benjamin Rivlin starts where Haines stops, examining the Libyan question before the United Nations General Assembly. He similarly describes the diplomatic struggles between the great powers and then between Cold War rivals, which resulted in the creation of the Libyan state, the result favored by Britain and the United States.²²

²² Scott L. Bills, *The Libyan Arena: The United States, Britain, and the Council of Foreign Ministers, 1945-1948* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995); William

There are a number of studies that examine Libyan political developments and determine the main factors that shaped modern Libya. In relation to Libyan foreign policy, many of these works criticize without providing sufficient context about the domestic and international realities that obliged Libyan foreign-policymakers to side with the West. For example, Salaheddin Hasan Sury pointed out in his chapter “Political Developments in Libya, 1952-1962: Institutions, Policies, and Ideology” that Libyan foreign policy was clearly pro-Western, demonstrated by King Idris’s insistence on keeping foreign bases and strong relations with the West. Sury concludes, “King Idris followed a very cautious foreign policy . . . despite his strong attachment to the west . . . King Idris insisted on keeping the bases and stood strong against any attempt to revise the treaties governing them. He continued to the last to view the west, particularly the British, as a source of security for his person and for his domain.”²³ Similarly, Dirk Vandewalle’s *A History of Modern Libya* examines political developments related to the creation of Libya: “The independence of Libya pulled the country inexorably into the western camp. . . . The country was created at the behest of the western powers. . . . the Sanusi Kingdom became a valued client [to the western camp.]”²⁴ These studies present negative assessments of the foreign-policy performance of the United Kingdom of Libya.

Roger Louis, *The British Empire in the Middle East: Arab Nationalism, the United States, and Postwar Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); C. Grove Haines, “The Problem of the Italian Colonies,” *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 4 (October 1947): 417-31; Benjamin Rivlin, “The Italian Colonies and the General Assembly,” *International Organization* 3 no. 3 (August 1949): 459-70.

²³ J. A. Allan, ed., *Libya since Independence: Economic and Political Development* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 127.

²⁴ Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 44-45.

Ronald Bruce's seminal work *Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife* explores Libyan-American relations throughout the twentieth century. In examining U.S. policy toward Libya before independence, Bruce concludes that only Soviet intentions in the Mediterranean and American plans for a military base in Libya led the United States ultimately to support the creation of an independent Libyan state. His other long-term study, *Libya: From Colony to Revolution*, provides a historical narrative that covers Libya's early history as a state up to the recent Arab Spring. Within that context, he explains how U.S. strategic interests in Libya (embodied in the 1954 military base agreement that established a twenty-year lease) coincided with the question of Libyan independence in the Council of Foreign Ministers and the United Nations. Interestingly, what makes his argument different is his assertion that Libya was never pro-Western. Instead, Libyan foreign policy rested on the "monarchy's belief that the Western powers (Britain and the United States) remained in the best position to guarantee Libyan security and financial and political assistance, especially in the decade of 1950s."²⁵

In a similar argument on Libyan foreign policy and international relations, John Wright's *Libya: A Modern History* examines the Libyan foreign-policy position in the early 1950s. As a new state, he concludes, it was inexperienced in terms of foreign policy and therefore not in a good negotiating position. Therefore, it took an unassuming

²⁵ Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya: From Colony to Revolution* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2012); idem, *Libya and the United States*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002)

stance toward the Western powers that supported its creation economically and politically. He also examines the discovery of oil in the late 1950s and its impact on Libyan foreign policy toward the West in general and the United States in particular. Given improving economic revenues in the 1960s, the Libyan government sought to rid itself of foreign bases in response to both internal and external pressures.²⁶ Wright's assessment of Libyan foreign policy more accurately reflects the reality of Libya at the time. Libyan policymakers skillfully sought to demonstrate and maintain Libya's independence without hurting its international relations.

Recently, historian Gretchen Heefner's "A Slice of their Sovereignty": Negotiating the U.S. Empire of Bases, Wheelus Field, Libya, 1950-1954" makes two highly significant and interlocking arguments. She argues that military deployments and base negotiations led U.S. policymakers to formulate and accept a limited view of sovereignty and independence that justified their new "informal" empire. On other hand, she argues for the power and possibility of using military histories to enrich our understanding of the United States and its interactions with the world. She did a very good job in detailing the Libyan-American negotiations that resulted in Wheelus Field, that formed the core of American-Libyan relations throughout 1950s and 1960s, and that gave the United States a crucial strategic point in the Mediterranean against Soviet Union in the Cold War.²⁷

²⁶John Wright, *Libya: A Modern History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); idem, *A History of Libya* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Gretchen Heefner, "A Slice of their Sovereignty": Negotiating the U.S. Empire of Bases, Wheelus Field, Libya, 1950-1954," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (January 2017): 50-77.

Finally, a recent academic study on Libyan-American relations is Daher El-Hasnawee's work.²⁸ He examines Libyan-American relations starting with the geographic importance of Libya in U.S. strategy in the region, which shaped America's position on and role in Libya independence. Then he details the development of U.S. interests in Libya after independence, focusing on Libyan-American negotiations about Wheelus field through the tenures of Libyan Prime Ministers Mahmoud Muntasir (1951-1953) and Mustafa Bin Halim (1953-1957). El-Hasnawee also examines the reaction in Libya as the agreement moved through the Parliament as well as changes in U.S. policy, especially after the Suez Crisis. Although he points out Libyan foreign policy toward the United States and the national role of Libyan policymakers, he concludes that Libyan independence was incomplete. Oddly, he also downplays Libyan sovereignty and agency, seemingly ignoring the history told in the book about how it took four years of negotiation before the Wheelus agreement was barely approved, as Libyans guarded and defended their independence fiercely throughout this process.²⁹

In conclusion, the historiography of Libyan-American relations between World War II and the Gaddafi coup in 1969 falls largely into two categories. The first school was influenced by national movements that prevailed the Middle East, especially Nasser's Pan-Arabism. Many Libyans and certainly Gaddafi were affected drastically by this ideology. This view sees the monarchy simply as a pro-Western state, because it concluded treaties with the Western countries. Flowing from this interpretation, these

²⁸ Daher El-Hasnawee, *El-Alaqat Al-Libiyah Al-Amrikiyah, 1945-1960, Ruyah Istratijiyyah* [Libyan-American relations, 1945-1960: a strategic vision] (Damascus: Syria: Orient Printing & Publishing, 2012).

²⁹ Ibid., 8, 294.

writers attribute no political or economic successes to the Idris regime, not even the creation of Libya in 1951. The second school of historiography tends to take the polar opposite view of Libyan foreign policy. It tends to turn a blind eye to any Libyan foreign-policy shortcomings toward the West, while emphasizing Western foreign policy toward Libya. Although these views differ significantly, both downplay or even ignore the historical agency of the Libyans in these interactions. Therefore, there is sufficient room to develop a more centrist interpretation of Libyan-American relations during the monarchical period that would center Libyans and their decision-making as the new country and its people sought to define their place in the world.

Through this work, I will re-explore Libyan-American relations in the monarchical period, which stretches from independence in 1951 through 1960, drawing on a variety of archival resources from the United States and secondary works in both English and Arabic. Chapter two introduces the historical roots of Libyan-American relations starting from the nineteenth century through independence to provide the context for the postwar relationship. Relations throughout the 1950s were characterized by a weak new state seeking to define its course in light of the United States emerging as a great power. Though weak, Libyan policymakers did not simply cower to the domination of Western powers, as many scholars have described this period. Chapter three focuses on the Libyan-American military agreements in the 1950s that ultimately resulted in Libya granting the U.S. a twenty-year agreement for Wheelus Airbase. This incident provides an opportunity to examine how the leaders of the reborn Libyan nation negotiated with the United States as a fellow sovereign nation, not as a dependent state

despite the power disparity between the two. It also reveals how U.S. policy in North Africa was increasingly shaped by the developing Cold War. Chapter four evaluates Libyan-American relations until 1959 (the year that oil was discovered) with a focus on U.S. aid programs—including the Point Four technical assistance program—which served as instruments to promote goodwill as well as to give the United States more opportunities to have staff in the country and to observe unfolding events. Maintaining close relations with Libya was increasingly important to the United States following the Suez Crisis in the fall of 1956 and its aftermath, as evidenced by the 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine and U.S. efforts in Libya to limit Egyptian influence. Ultimately, relations between Washington and Tripoli fundamentally changed with the discovery of oil.

Additionally, in chapter five, I will highlight the role of public history in crafting this new interpretation by using newly created and recently archived oral histories to explain the Libyan roots of the government's foreign policy toward the United States, with an emphasis on how Libyan policymakers built foreign policies that shaped Libya's position in world politics. I will specifically use their reactions to U.S. policies during periods of high tension, especially after 1955, to better understand their position in reassessing U.S. policy following the Suez Crisis. Playing a key role in this period were Libyan-Egyptian relations, which influenced and complicated the Libyan political scene at the time. I will also examine the historiography of oral history and enrich this by examining the challenges and opportunities facing the development of oral history in Libya. Although Libyan oral history suffers many challenges, the chapter will also examine the value of Libyan oral history and how it can help the people of the country as

they again seek to establish an independent and sovereign state in the midst of challenging international conditions.

CHAPTER II:

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

Modern Libya (made up of the three provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan¹) suffered under a succession of foreign governments over the last five centuries. These centuries can be divided into five main historical main stages: the first Ottoman era (1551-1711), Karamanli family rule (1711-1835), the second Ottoman era (1835-1911), Italian occupation (1911-1943), and Anglo-French administration (1943-1951). Libya finally gained its independence in December 1951 as the United Kingdom of Libya. Its neighbors—who have often played significant roles in its history and politics—are Egypt and Sudan to the east, Tunisia and Algeria to the west, Niger and Chad to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north, which provides Libya with more than a thousand miles of shoreline. Additionally, Libya’s close proximity to Europe has lent Libya strategic and geographic importance throughout its history. During the Ottoman eras and Karamanli rule, Libya was known as the “Province of West Tripoli,” which encompassed Tripoli itself, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan as the three administrative provinces. The name

¹ See Figure 1.

“Libya” was officially used for the first time during Italian colonization, which also demarcated the current political borders mentioned above.²



Figure 1: Libyan Map including Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan³

Libya—formerly part of the Ottoman Empire—became an Italian colony in 1911. In September 1911, Italy informed the Sublime Porte of its intention to occupy Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and it followed through on that intention in October 1911, which led to the outbreak of the Italian-Turkish War of 1911-1912, which ended with the

² Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 6-7.

³ “Trump Aide Advocates Partitioning Libya,” *North Africa Post*, 10 April 2017, <http://northafricapost.com/17284-trumps-aide-advocates-partioning-libya.html>

Ottoman Empire ceding Libya to Italy in October 1912; however it did not relinquish its religious sovereignty, and this set the stage for later struggles over the future of both Tripoli and Cyrenaica. For example, in Cyrenaica the resistance to Italian occupation centered on the Sanusi Order, a religious movement that engaged in political struggle for two decades, which only ended with the 1931 hanging of Omar Al-Mukhtar, the leader of the national resistance movement. However, his followers, who fled the country, later reorganized their resistance forces and participated in World War II on the side of the Allies, which ultimately resulted in Libya's independence as a political entity but also with the sense that there was a duty for the Western countries to aid the new nation.⁴

During these periods, U.S. relations remained very limited with Libya and were confined primarily to trying to protect its commerce, which was a general trend in U.S. foreign relations throughout the century. The Middle East, including the Mediterranean, was not an area that attracted significant American involvement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But this does not mean that there were not any U.S. interests there. Indeed, there were commercial, cultural, and philanthropic interests throughout the region. The late eighteenth century and the nineteenth century saw significant cultural efforts by American missionaries to promote education and evangelical activities with the goal of converting non-Christians in the region and establishing cultural institutions for these purposes. In addition, primary and secondary schools and hospitals were established in the region.⁵ The U.S. presence in the Middle East throughout the

⁴ Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 25-34.

⁵ DeNovo, *American Interests and Politics*, 3-18; Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 1-3.

nineteenth century remained largely cultural and religious except for some commercial interests in the Mediterranean that involved the United States in the first military conflict in its history with Libya, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire. The limited cultural engagement of the nineteenth century changed rapidly in the early twentieth century with the emergence of oil investments in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula; economic interests soon came to be the focus of U.S. policy in the region.

American corporations sought new opportunities to invest in the emerging oil industry despite fierce competition from the British and other European powers, which objected to U.S. oil interests in the region. The Americans, in turn, began objecting to European colonialism and professed to support nationalist independence movements in the Middle East that would potentially overthrow imperialism, especially in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf, with the goal of opening up markets. Britain, in turn, did its best to exercise political influence among Arab leaders to prevent American firms from gaining oil concessions throughout the early twentieth century, as it did in 1908 in Iran when organizing the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Nonetheless, by the early 1920s, American firms had gained 23 oil concessions, including a 75% share in the Iraq Petroleum Company. In 1932, the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) earned an oil concession on Bahrain Island and in 1934 established its ownership of the Gulf Oil Corporation in Kuwait. Most significant of all of the U.S. concessions was Saudi Arabia's sixty-year extension of its oil concession to Texaco through the California-Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC), which was renamed the Arabian-American

Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1944.⁶ By the early twentieth century, U.S. economic interests in the Mediterranean and Middle East eclipsed earlier cultural interests and laid the foundation for further growth by American firms after World War I.

Although U.S. involvement in the Middle East was limited politically in the interwar period, the United States had a generally good reputation among Arab nations as a result of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's idealistic "Fourteen Points," a list providing guidance on how to rebuild international relations after the First World War, which included the right to self-determination for all peoples. Nonetheless, the United Kingdom and its policies continued to dominate in the region following the Great War. Only with World War II and the Cold War was there a major shift in the power dynamics of the Middle East. In the postwar period, the U.S. role expanded, as British and French power began wasting away as a result of the war and their colonial history in the region. The other catalyst for expanding U.S. power came from the Soviet Union, which sought a larger role in the Middle East following the war. For example, at the Potsdam Conference that immediately followed German surrender, Moscow sought to become a trustee over Libya. Increasingly, the United States paid more attention to the region, serving as an alternative to both Britain and the Soviet Union, and in turn, Washington increasingly linked the security of the Mediterranean and Middle East to the national security interests of the United States.⁷

⁶ Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*, 2-3; DeNovo, *American Interests and Politics*, 202-9.

⁷ Mustafa, *El-Welayat El-Motahida Wa Masherq El-Arabi*, 79-83; DeNovo, *American Interests and Politics*, 383-94.

The Libyan-American War and Relations in the Nineteenth Century

Libyan-American relations date back to the early history of the United States and were marked by an armed conflict between the two that lasted from 1801 until 1805. The newly independent United States sought to protect its commercial interests in the Mediterranean; most American history texts refer to this as a conflict with “Barbary pirates.” U.S. foreign commerce had suffered significantly in the immediate post-independence period, as British markets closed to American traders; the French and Spanish mercantile systems similarly shut out the new competitor and its ideas of free trade. Subsequently, U.S. merchants and shippers sought out new markets and opportunities in the Baltic, the Orient, and the Mediterranean. As a result, American merchant ships sailed throughout the Mediterranean.⁸ Transit across the Mediterranean had been restricted by North Africa for centuries, forcing commercial shippers to pay tribute for the privilege. As a result of these restrictions, commercial enterprises lobbied in the United States to pressure Congress to make treaties with the North African states to protect and free American commerce in the Mediterranean. To do so, the United States had to establish diplomatic relations with these countries. So, in 1784 Congress appointed a special commission (comprised of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson) to oversee the process of negotiating treaties with the North African states, which resulted in signed treaties with Morocco (1786), Algiers (1795), and Tunis

⁸ Trade in Turkish opium attracted the United States to the Mediterranean so that vessels sailed from Turkey across the Mediterranean via the Strait of Gibraltar and the Cape of Good Hope then toward the Indian Ocean before the opening the Suez Canal in 1869. Little, *American Orientalism*, 64-65; M. J. Coye and J. Livingston, eds., *China: Yesterday and Today* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 151-52.

(1797). But the commission encountered difficulties in achieving similar success with Libya.⁹

In 1786, Adams and Jefferson conducted unsuccessful negotiations with the Tripolitanian envoy. The Tripolitanian financial demands were very high and could not be accommodated given the limited funds the commission had available. Jefferson's biographer Dumas Malone described the talks: "The meeting with the Tripolitanian minister was even fruitless. That bearded, pipe-smoking emissary calmly asserted that it was the duty of his countrymen to make war on 'sinners' and asked for much more peace money than they could pay."¹⁰ Nonetheless, these talks constituted the first diplomatic exchange between Libya and the United States.

The negotiations restarted in 1796 with Yusuf Karamanli. His family had detached Tripoli politically from the Ottoman Empire (often referred to as the Sublime Porte by Western diplomats) and established themselves as independent regents. Yusuf, who ruled as Pasha from 1795 to 1832, was always eager to promote and sustain the political independence of Libya from both Algiers and the Sublime Porte and sought to establish Tripolitania as a maritime power in the Mediterranean that would rival Algiers and expand his dominance across the sea. However, the United States, for the sake of its Mediterranean commerce, sought to establish a treaty relationship with Tripolitania, especially after the loss of two American vessels (the *Betsy* and the *Sophia*) in August 1796. It succeeded and signed a treaty with Tripoli. On November 4, 1796, Joel Barlow,

⁹ Thomas A. Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975: A Survey* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 1-3.

¹⁰ Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 51-52; St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 22.

the new American consul general at Algiers, and the Pasha of Tripoli concluded a treaty of peace and friendship for a cost of \$56,000 (which was to be paid directly to the Pasha of Tripoli), which was guaranteed by the dey of Algiers (who was mutual friend of the two sides). The treaty created a system of passports and called for the exchange of consuls between the two countries to maintain the peace. The treaty was ratified by the United States on January 10, 1797, and James Leander Cathcart traveled to Tripoli to serve as the first U.S. consul there. Unfortunately, this effort at peace instead precipitated what Arabic sources call the Four Years War (1801-1805). America misunderstood some articles in the treaty, and subsequently it viewed Tripoli as a dependency of Algiers. However, from 1796, Yusuf Karamanli had repeatedly instructed the United States in official communications to treat Tripoli as sovereign state, something that U.S. officials did not do, instead treating Libya as a dependency of Algiers.¹¹

In response, Karamanli refused to receive Cathcart. But the newly appointed consul asked the British consul, Simon Lucas, to negotiate on the American's behalf with Karamanli. In this difficult situation, Cathcart nonetheless managed, in new talks with the Pasha, to improve relations with the promise that the U.S. government would pay \$18,000. Karamanli remained suspicious toward the United States given its earlier treatment of Libya, which differed from its treatment of Algiers, Morocco, and Tunis. Therefore he sent a letter on April 15, 1799, to U.S. President John Adams reiterating that his agreement with Cathcart would continue to be valid only as long as the United States treated Tripoli exactly as it did the other North African states. Although the United

¹¹ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 22-23; St. John, *Libya*, 40-41; Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East*, 4-5.

States confirmed its willingness to treat Tripoli equitably, it procrastinated in paying the agreed-upon amount. Karamanli then informed Cathcart that if the United States would not abide by its promises, he would capture any U.S. vessels in the Mediterranean. Indeed, the Tripolitanian Navy captured the American vessel the *Cathrin* in October 1800, holding it for one month, which worsened relations.¹²

U.S. interests in promoting free trade ran head-on into Karamanli's desire to establish Tripoli as a maritime power on a par with the other states in the region, resulting in war between the two countries. Karamanli now demanded a new treaty, payment of \$250,000, and annual tribute of \$20,000 as an alternative of war, which was summarily rejected by the U.S. government, which now anticipated the use of force to protect its commerce in the Mediterranean. U.S. Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and William Eaton, the American consul at Tunis, encouraged newly elected President Thomas Jefferson to forcefully preserve U.S. national interests in the Mediterranean.¹³

After the Americans refused the Libyan demands, Karamanli officially declared war against the United States on May 14, 1801. The U.S. consulate in Tripoli was attacked by Karamanli's soldiers, and the consul was expelled. The United States responded by dispatching a squadron of four vessels under the command of Commodore Richard Dale to the shores of Tripoli with orders to devastate Tripolitanian ships and initiate a blockade of the Tripolitania coast.¹⁴ It was successful in imposing a blockade, but it failed to occupy the port of Tripoli. In October 1803, the Tripolitanian navy

¹² Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya 1949-1957*, 20-22; St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 23; St. John, *Libya*, 41-42.

¹³ Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East*, 4-5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

captured the frigate *Philadelphia* along with its crew of 307, significantly weakening the American position in the war, especially after failure of negotiations to release the crew. In February 1804, the *Philadelphia* was destroyed in the Tripoli harbor, either by American sailor Stephen Decatur or by orders of Yusuf Karamanli. The U.S. government, frustrated at this turn of events, decided to defeat Karamanli by helping his older brother, Ahmed, regain authority over (Tripolitania) Libya.¹⁵

Cathcart first proposed this plan in 1801 to bring Ahmed back from his exile in Egypt, and William Eton, the U.S. naval agent appointed to North Africa in 1804, took up the idea in his new position. Eton met Ahmed at the British consulate in Alexandria, Egypt, in February 1805. They concluded a treaty that granted the Americans privileges in Tripoli in return for U.S. help in overthrowing Yusuf Karamanli and helping Ahmed Karamanli regain his throne in Libya.¹⁶ With this agreement, Eton left Egypt for Libya across the western desert with a small armed group in the spring of 1805, while Ahmed left Egypt via the Mediterranean to seize the port of Darnah in east Tripolitania (approximately 250 miles from the Libyan-Egyptian border). Darnah was attacked from two sides, facing Eton's troops by land and shelling from the U.S. fleet offshore. Because of the weakness of the port's defenses and the support of the fleet, Eton was able to occupy the city, which made an impression on Yusuf, who began to fear the result of his war with the Americans. He eventually concluded a treaty of peace with the United States in June 1805. Under the terms of this treaty, the two sides exchanged prisoners (with the Libyans agreeing that American captives would be treated as prisoners of war

¹⁵ Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 23-24.

¹⁶ St. John, *Libya*, 42-44; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 22-24.

and not slaves), and the United States paid \$60,000 dollars for all of captives. Additionally, the U.S. also withdrew its forces (including Ahmed Karamanli), Yusuf agreed to release Ahmed's wife and children (who had been held captive in Tripoli), Tripolitania granted privileges to the U.S. while relinquishing any claims to future tribute, and the two countries pledged to exchange consulates. After some delay, the U.S. Senate ratified the treaty on April 12, 1806.¹⁷

This military engagement marked U.S. involvement with Libya as being significantly different from its other relations with the Middle East during the early nineteenth century. But there is a similarity in that commercial relations and open markets were the focus of the new nation's foreign policy. Interestingly, these early military actions might have also played a role in U.S.-Libyan relations later in the century. As the United States sought naval stations, its earlier encounters gave it a greater awareness of Libya's coastal assets.

The rule of the Karamanli family over Libya, which had lasted for more than a century (1711-1835), ended shortly after the death of Yusuf, and Libya (the autonomous province of Tripoli) returned again to direct control by the Sublime Porte. During the second period of Ottoman rule (1835-1911), Libyan-American relations were very limited. One of the only notable events in this period came with the suggestion of Michael Vidal, the U.S. consul in Tripoli during 1870-1876, that the U.S. establish a coaling station on the Cyrenaican coast near Tobruk (100 miles from the Libyan-Egyptian border). Vidal was aware of the strategic importance of Libya in Mediterranean

¹⁷ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 24-26; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 22-24.

affairs, and he thought such a coaling station would increase American military prestige among the European powers, which were increasingly involved in the Middle East and Mediterranean. Vidal cabled the State Department promoting the “possibility for the United States government to acquire a naval station in the Mediterranean Sea.” He wrote that “Bomba [Tobruk], [is] one of the very few sea-ports with deep water to be found on the northern coast of Africa.”¹⁸ Vidal advocated that his government establish a strategic global network of cables, colonies, and coaling stations similar to what Britain maintained in the region.¹⁹

This small spike in American interest in Libya quickly ended, however. When a new consul was appointed to Tripoli in October 1876, his instructions from Secretary of State Hamilton Fish put a stop to any U.S. aspirations for a naval base and to promoting emancipation of slaves in the Mediterranean. “Unlike some, at least, of the European governments,” Fish wrote, “we have no political objects in the Turkish dominion. . . . we covet no occasions to bluster or domineer there, certainly none such as sentimental patronage of benighted Africans would require of us.”²⁰ These instructions largely closed the first chapter of Libyan-American relations.

In October 1911, Italy invaded Ottoman Libya, attempting to annex some of the last African territories not already occupied by European powers. This occupation lasted three decades, until the end of World War II and Italy’s loss of all its colonies. The U.S.

¹⁸ United States Department of State (hereafter USDS), *Executive Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives, 1873-1874*, vol. II (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1874), 1167.

¹⁹ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 28-29.

²⁰ As quoted in James A. Field, “A Scheme in Regard to Cyrenaica” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (December 1957): 467; St. John, *Libya*, 50-52.

declared its neutrality in the Libyan-Italian War in response to a request for mediation from the Ottoman government. Despite some advocacy in the State Department to respond positively to the request in order to gain Turkish trade concessions, U.S. President William Howard Taft sided with his Secretary of State in the belief that such mediation would violate the principle of the Monroe Doctrine, irritate the European powers, and instigate their interference in the western hemisphere.²¹ This closed American relations with Libya until the outbreak of the Second World War, which played a crucial role in both U.S.-Middle East relations in general and U.S.-Libyan relations in particular.

The Second World War and U.S. Involvement in Libya

World War II deeply involved the United States in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean in particular. However, war-time involvement, especially in Libya, primarily rested on British relations with Sayed Idris Sanusi, who became the king of Libya after independence. Both the British influence in Libya after the war and Libya's strategic importance during the war played major roles in U.S. policy toward Libya. In particular, the war emphasized Libya's strategic importance for controlling Egypt, the Suez Canal, and the oil fields in the Middle East. As a result, Libya became a key

²¹ Bryson, *American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East*, 47; Fred Rippy, "The United States and Europe's Strife 1908-1913" *Journal of Politics* 4, no. 1 (February 1942): 72-75; DeNovo, *American Interests and Politics*, 51-52.

military theater in North African military operations between the Axis powers of Italy and Germany and the Allied powers of Britain, France, and the United States.²²

On June 10, 1940, Italy declared war against Britain, and Libya quickly became a key theater of operations. The first phase of military operations commenced in September 1940 when Italian Marshal Rodolfo Graziani invaded Egypt using eastern

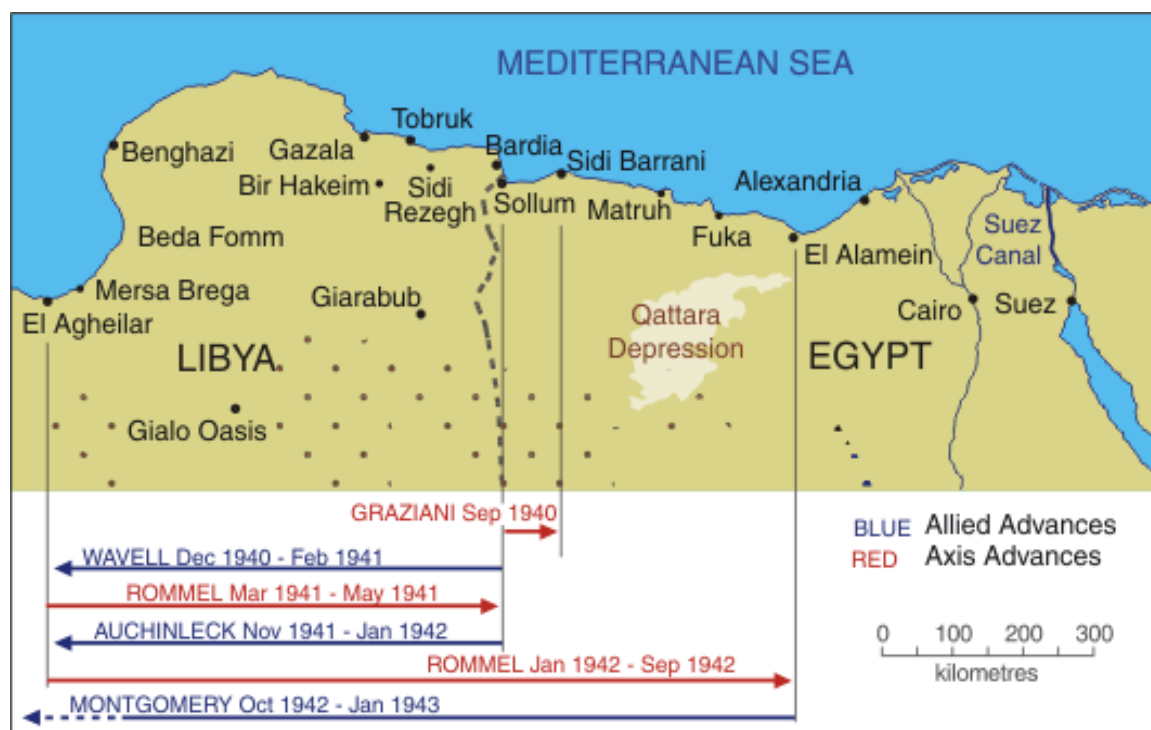


Figure 2: Military Operations in Libya during the World War II²³

Libya as a base of operations, but Graziani's troops could not overrun Sidi Brani's forces on the Libyan-Egyptian border (see Figure 2). In December, a British army commanded

²² St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 36; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 27-28.

²³ "The Siege of Tobruk, April 1941-December 1941," Digger History, <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-battles/ww2/tobruk.htm>.

by General Archibald Wavell chased the Italian army back to Benghazi (500 miles from the Egyptian border, see Figure 2), which was occupied for the first time by the British army. The second phase of military operations started in the spring of 1941, when Italy's young troops were reinforced by the German Afrika Korps commanded by General Erwin Rommel (popularly known as the Desert Fox). His forces drove for Alexandria, Egypt, after hard fighting in the Libyan Desert over several months ended with a defeat of a British army. However, that fall (1942) a new phase of operations began when General Bernard Montgomery assumed command of the British Eighth Army, triumphed at El-Alamein in Egypt (located west of Alexandria 65 miles, see Figure 2), and chased the Axis armies back to Benghazi on November 20, 1942. In the meantime, General Philippe Leclerc Hauteclocque's Free French Brigade invaded Libya from the south through Chad to occupy Fezzan before finally meeting up with other Allied forces at Tripoli. With the Allied invasion of North Africa, forces commanded by U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower eventually surrounded the Afrika Korps in Tunis, the last Axis stronghold in North Africa. On January 23, 1943, British tanks entered the city of Tripoli, while other Allied forces occupied the rest of Libya.²⁴

With the end of military operations in Libya, rule of the country was divided between a British military administration in Tripoli (the northwestern section of the country, see Figure 1) and Cyrenaica (the northeastern part of the nation, see Figure 1) and a French military administration in Fezzan (the southern section, see Figure 1). In

²⁴ Geoff Simons, *Libya and the West: From Independence to Lockerbie* (Oxford: Center for Libyan Studies, 2003), 14-15, 17; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 46-55; St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 38-43.

other words, the three provinces of Libya were treated as occupied enemy territory, despite the organization of Libyan troops under Sayed Idris Sanusi, who had fought with the British, which will be discussed further below. This designation as occupied enemy territory complicated the Libyan question after the war and led to much confusion about its ultimate fate throughout the 1940s.²⁵

In regard to Libyan forces and their involvement in the war, in October 1939—just one month after Germany's invasion of Poland that led to declarations of war from France and Britain—the exiled Libyan leaders met in Alexandria, Egypt, to strategize about their next actions. Most of these leaders had escaped Libya with the cessation of the national struggle against Italian occupation that was marked by the hanging Omar Al-Mukhtar²⁶ in 1931. Believing that it was likely that Italy would eventually join the conflict on the side of its German ally, they discussed what the war might mean for the future of their country. There was some contention between those from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and some Tripolitanian leaders believed that the Axis powers would be victorious and that Italian leaders would seek revenge against those who had sided with the Allies. But the majority chose Sayed Idris Sanusi²⁷ as their leader and declared their

²⁵ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 42-50; Simons, *Libya and the West*, 15.

²⁶ Omar al-Mukhtar (1860-1931) was a national hero of Libya and member of the Sanusiyyah order who commanded the anticolonial resistance in Cyrenaica from 1923 to 1931. Ali Muhammad, *Omar Al Mokhtar: Lion of the Desert: The Biography of Shaikh Omar Al Mokhtar* (Egypt, Cairo : Al-Firdous, 2011), 7, 32-39

²⁷ His full name was Idris Muhammed al-Mahdi al-Sanusi. He was born at Al-Jaghub Oasis, the headquarters of the Sanusi order, in 1890. He was a grandson of Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi, the founder of the Sanusi Muslim Sufi order (Sanusiyyah) who was born in Algeria, in the 1830s. In 1902 Idris succeeded his father as head of the order. His lineage is considered to be descended from the Prophet Mohammed (Peace upon Him). Idris became Chief of the Sanusi order in 1916 following the abdication of his cousin Ahmed Sharif al-Sanusi. He was recognized by the British under the new title

support for the Allies against Italy as the best route to facilitate the liberation of their land. In reality, most of these exiled leaders believed that they had little to lose, even if Italy won the war. Sayed Idris Sanusi understood Libya's position well; he said, "This opportunity was regarded as our chance to shoot the last arrow against our country's enemy. If we succeeded, the country would be recovered; if we failed, nothing would have been lost, since our country was already in the hands of the enemy."²⁸

Subsequently, Sayed Idris Sanusi sought out British officials in Egypt to coordinate with them how to enter the war. In Cairo, Egypt, in August 1940 (following the June 10, 1940, entry of Italy into the war), he officially negotiated how the Libyan Arab Force, known as the "Sanusi Army," would serve under British command. In public statements, Sanusi urged his countrymen to take part in the military operations for the final liberation of their country. A recruitment bureau was set up in Cairo under the direction of Colonel C. O. Bromilow, Assistant Military Secretary of British Troops in Egypt, and assisted by Colonel J. N. D. Anderson as liaison officer. Five battalions were organized, including Libyan soldiers who had fought with the Italians and had been taken prisoner at the Battle of Sidi Brani earlier that year. The Sanusi Army also claimed the

Emir (prince) of the territory of Cyrenaica, a position also confirmed by the Italians in 1920. He was also installed as Emir of Tripolitania on 1922. He went into exile in Egypt to serve in the national struggle that used guerrilla warfare against the colonial Italian government under the leadership of Omar Mukhtar. Idris was particularly angered that when Benito Mussolini and the Fascists took authority in Italy in 1922 that the new government nullified all of the agreements concluded in 1916 and 1917 between Idris and previous Italian Government as a condition of the cease-fire in Cyrenaica. For more details, see E. E. Evans Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 104-34.

²⁸ Oral history interview with Sayed Idris Sanusi, as quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 28-29.

loyalty of exiled Libyans in Sudan and Tunis who were instructed to collaborate with the French authorities and participate in the invasion of southern Libya through Fezzan. General Maitland Wilson, Commander of British forces in Egypt, attended the meeting and indicated Britain's official willingness to sponsor the Libyan army by paying its expenses and integrating it into the British Eighth Army. A few of the Tripolitarians, including two of their principal leaders--Ahmed Al Swahili and Tahir Murayyid—refused to sign the resolutions of the meeting and justified their opposition due to the lack of oral promise from Britain that they would support the future independence of Libya. According to the resolutions of the Cairo meeting, Libya entered the war as part of the British Eighth Army.²⁹

The five battalions of the Libyan Arab Force, consisting of 11,084 soldiers and 96 officers, played an important role in the war, especially in guerrilla warfare on the Libyan border, due to their knowledge about the country. They also took part in fighting in the Western Desert campaign and in the Battle of Tobruk. But because the desert campaign required a high degree of technical and mechanical skill, Libyan troops mainly guarded prisoners, installations, and lines of communications to free British troops for more active operations. However, when Allied forces were defeated after the first occupation of Cyrenaica in 1941 and withdrew back to Egypt's borders, British troops needed intelligence on Axis movements. At this point, Major V. Peniekoff chose a group of

²⁹ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 30-32; Lord Rennell of Rodd, *British Military Administration of Occupied Territories in Africa during the Years 1941-1947* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), 254-56; Hasan Soliman Mahmoud, *Libya Bain El-Madi Wa Hader* [Libya between past and present] (Tripoli, Libya: El-Markz El-Thkafi El-Arabi, 1961), 245-46.

three Libyan officers and twenty-five soldiers to gather information about Axis movements. This small group also helped British troops escape who had been captured by the Axis in Tobruk, and they exploded a petroleum depot, depriving the enemy of this crucial resource. Such operations showed the value of Libyans as guides in the desert.³⁰

Throughout the war, Sanusi endeavored to get an official British promise concerning Libya's independence after the war either publicly or in secret. Such a promise would improve his position, especially with Tripolitanian leaders who were divided on their support for Sanusi as the future political leader of Libya. Therefore, he intensified his correspondence with British authorities in Egypt throughout 1941, insisting each time on the future independence of Libya. As a result of these efforts, Britain's war-time Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, made a statement in Parliament on the future of Libya on January 28, 1942, indicating that after the war Cyrenaica would not again fall under Italian domination. The statement was disappointing to Sanusi and his followers, because it fell far short of promising independence and only spoke of Cyrenaica, ignoring Tripolitania and Fezzan. Nonetheless, it accurately explained British policy toward Libya, in which Cyrenaica held strategic importance for British interests in Egypt. Libyan leaders sharply criticized Eden's statement, which seemingly promoted the notion of dividing Libya and which certainly made the political future of Libya more complicated. Sanusi later explained British hesitance about making a written promise. He said, "They had given [such a written] pledge to King Husayn [of Jordan] during

³⁰ Lord Rennell, *British Military Administration*, 255; Ahmed Mohamed Elgalal, *Sanawat El-harb Wa Edarah El-asskaria El-Britannia Fee Barka: 1939-1949* [The years of war and British military administration in Cyrenica: 1939-1949] (Benghazi, Libya: University of Gar Yuns Press, 2003), 131-36.

World War One, which they could not fulfill; they accordingly did not want to give such a pledge but preferred to extend their utmost assistance to their allies after they had won the war.”³¹ As a result, Libya remained under Anglo-French military administration until 1951, well after the war had ended in Libya and elsewhere. This state of affairs set the stage for difficult postwar negotiations and diplomatic jostling regarding the independence of this war-time ally.

The U.S. Position after the War

The political future of Libya was tied up in the question of the fate of all the former Italian colonies, and the Allies were reluctant to deal with these questions during the war. So when the Libyans demanded self-government after their liberation in 1943, British authorities told them they had to await the signing of peace treaty with Italy, because the Libyan provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan were still legally the territories of Italy. But the colonial question, and especially the fate of Libya, became a diplomatic football among the Allies (especially, France, Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States), a game that became even more complicated with the emergence after the Second World War of the Cold War between two of the former allies. As a result, the question of the Italian colonies became a most complicated issue after the war, subject to the conflicting desires of the great powers.³²

³¹ Oral history interview with Sayed Idris Sanusi, as quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 36-37. See also Adrian Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations: A Case of Planned Decolonization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 40-41.

³² Haines, “Problem of Italian Colonies,” 418. See also Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 134-36.

The U.S. position on the question of Libya varied throughout the war before hardening during the emerging Cold War. While the war raged, the U.S. vacillated between the idealism of self-determination and the realism of denying the Soviet Union access to northern Africa. Even U.S. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles described the American policy as “both timid and wavering.”³³ Anglo-American relations primarily influenced U.S. views on the disposition of the Italian colonies in general and Libya in particular. Although the United States had seemingly endorsed anti-colonial movements around the world in the Atlantic Charter, this can also be seen as a continuation of America’s prewar efforts to increase its presence (and economic power) in the Middle East. Therefore, self-determination was also a tool to help the United States promote its postwar interests in the region by supporting the aspirations of the colonized peoples, especially when this coincided with nationalism in the region.³⁴

In early war-time discussions, the U.S. policy toward Libya was subsumed in the broad statement made through the declaration of the Atlantic Charter in August 1941. In that charter, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill jointly pledged respect for the self-determination of peoples as well as progress toward global economic justice. The Atlantic Charter became the touchstone for U.S. policymakers in the following year, as they considered it a global commitment. For this reason, Libyans seeking postwar independence had every reason to believe that autonomy, or even independence, was very achievable. However, as the war moved

³³ As quoted in Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 265.

³⁴ Christopher D. O’Sullivan, *Sumner Welles, Postwar Planning, and the Quest for a New World Order, 1937-1943* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 137-38.

toward its conclusion, it became clear that the ideals of the Atlantic Charter, which had been signed by all of the Allies, were unlikely to be implemented in any concrete way, especially after the death of Roosevelt.³⁵

The U.S. State Department's Division of Political Studies outlined four alternative approaches to the question of Libya at the First Quebec Conference, which was held on 14-24 August 1943. The first option laid out in State's memorandum was the creation of an international trusteeship to govern Libya as part of a wider north African region. The conception was to administer Libya under international trusteeship shared by Britain, France, and Egypt. However, the U.S. position of this solution changed completely in the next few years. The second proposed solution was to divide Libya, detaching Cyrenaica and joining it with Egypt and adding Tripolitania to Tunisia. This proposal gained little traction, because the poor administration of Egypt made it seem unlikely that it could handle the additional challenge of integrating this new territory. Additionally, this course of action had the potential to disturb the balance of power in North Africa by adding Tripolitania to French Tunisia. The third alternative proposed by the State Department was returning Libya to a postwar Italy that presumably would be governed by leaders acceptable to the Allies. The fourth alternative—and the most dangerous one from the perspective of Libyan leaders—was the establishment of a Jewish refuge (or even state) in the Libyan province of Cyrenaica. The Jewish refugees would presumably occupy villages and farms vacated by the Italians. However, this idea of granting another external population these large and scarce areas of arable land (above

³⁵ Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 1-33; St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 87.

and beyond religious differences) seemed unlikely. Even at the time, the State Department noted that “an increase in Arab nationalism in Libya has been reported. An attempt to foster Jewish settlement in Libya might result in extending the area of Arab-Jewish conflict without offering any substantial relief to the Jewish refugees’ problem.”³⁶ The wide variance in the solutions proposed by this memorandum shows the unsettled state of American policy at the time.

The division of Libya remained an alternative during the war-time discussions of the great powers based on their own interests in Libya and the region. For example, in the spring of 1944, the British chiefs of staff endorsed this idea. They proposed detaching Cyrenaica to be an autonomous region under Egyptian sovereignty that would be protected by the United Nations through air and naval facilities in Benghazi, while Tripolitania would be returned to Italy. The U.S. response came in the form of a memorandum from Secretary of State Cordell Hull to President Roosevelt, who was then attending the second Quebec Conference. Hull believed the best solution for Libya would to be an international trusteeship over both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica administered by a commission of experts responsible to the United Nations.³⁷ While there was much discussion of Libya and North Africa in Anglo-American talks during the war, there was no agreement.

³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington and Quebec, 1943*, edited by William Slany and Richardson Dougall (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 798. See also *ibid.*, 796-98.

³⁷ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 41-42.

The Potsdam Conference, July 17-August 2, 1945

With the end of the war in Europe that came with the defeat of Germany in May 1945, the “Big Three”—Josef Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union; Winston Churchill, the war-time British Prime Minister, and his newly-elected successor Clement Atlee; and the new U.S. President, Harry Truman met in Potsdam, Germany, to deal with postwar issues. The major issue at the conference was to implement the agreements of the earlier Yalta Conference, held in February 1945, about how to handle Germany. On the opening day of the conference, Stalin raised the question of trusteeship, proposing that the “Soviet Union be named trustee of one of the Italian colonies.”³⁸ But this Soviet desire was opposed by Britain, which of course had significant interests in the Mediterranean. The United States, on the other hand, stated that it did not have any designs on the area. Truman recalled that “the United States did not want them (Tripolitania and Cyrenaica), nor did we want a trusteeship over them.”³⁹ Truman, however, endorsed the British position on Soviet claims over Libya. The gap between Anglo-American planning on one side and Soviet desires on the other side marked the entire conduct of the conference. Therefore, the disposition of Italian colonies, and Libya in particular, remained unsettled and was referred to the foreign ministers’ level and their planned meeting in London.

At Potsdam, the official U.S. position on North Africa seemed to be to follow the British lead. Even in its top-secret briefing for the conference, the U.S. lacked a definite position toward Libya. Instead, it simply ranked three solutions in order of preference.

³⁸ James Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947), 76.

³⁹ Harry Truman, *Year of Decisions*, vol. 1 (New York: New American Library of World Literature), 411-12.

Its first preference was to return Libya to Italian sovereignty in return for the demilitarization of the peninsula. Secondly, the U.S. preferred division of Libya into its historic parts (Tripoli, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan—see Figure 1), with Cyrenaica becoming the autonomous Sanusi Emirate (as Britain had promised) under British or Egyptian trusteeship and Tripolitania remaining under Italy's domination. Finally, America's third preference was the same as the second but with Tripolitania coming under an international trusteeship with Italy's supervision. This briefing book also indicates that the United States was increasingly aware of the strategic importance of Libya "for control of the central Mediterranean because of its ports and airfields."⁴⁰ This strategic awareness became increasingly important as the Cold War began to emerge.

The intermediate Anglo-American position—as they transitioned from prewar and war-time to post-war concerns—was still marked by an effort to exclude the Soviets from any expansion of its influence into the Mediterranean region. One of the primary reasons that trusteeship was not the first preference was the concern that it would potentially give Moscow a chance to compete with Anglo-American plans in the Mediterranean, which complicated the Libyan question, especially given its strategic importance. Therefore, throughout the war-time and post-war conferences, the Soviet Union argued with the United States and the British, both of whom had many bases around the world, about why they were ignoring legitimate Soviet security interests. After the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1945, Stalin suggested to the British representative that the issue

⁴⁰ St. John, *Libya*, 89-90; idem, *Libya and the United States*, 42; Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 29-36.

seemed to boil down to a lack of trust for a Soviet role in Tripolitania. Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin replied that the issue was not trust but that Great Britain wanted to avoid competition with its former allies in this key area.⁴¹ In this way, the Libyan question remained tied up in efforts to protect Anglo-American strategic interests in the Mediterranean.

The U.S. Position through the Council of Foreign Ministers

The Council of Foreign Ministers followed the Potsdam Conference, acting as the primary instrument for the great powers after the war. The Potsdam negotiators (the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union) appointed the council to resolve remaining issues related to the peace treaty. This so-called “society of victors” met from 1945 to 1948 in a series of long sessions. The most significant success of the Council of Foreign Ministers was a series of European peace treaties. Unfortunately, their discussions regarding the Italian colonies in general and Libya in particular (though discussed at most of the sessions) repeatedly eluded solution due largely to the increasing rivalry between the Anglo-American powers and the Soviet Union.⁴²

The first session of the Council of Foreign Ministers began in London on September 11, 1945. It worked on the peace treaty with Italy, including the disposition of that country’s colonies. The United States continued to vacillate over their fate, as they were not seen as a vital national security issue for U.S. policymakers. The State Department’s key concern was Soviet influence in the region rather than Libya itself.

⁴¹ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 42.

⁴² St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 43; Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 33-44, 55-62.

And these concerns were the primary reason that State supported giving Libya back to Italy as part of its sovereign territory or making it a trust territory administered by a neutral international commission under the supervision of the new United Nations.⁴³

Despite his limited interest, James Byrnes, Truman's Secretary of State, took the most idealistic view toward Libya, but U.S. security interests remained paramount. Despite the American interest in strengthening pro-Western sentiment in Italy, he did not support Italy's desire to retain all of its colonies. He hoped Italy would be realistic about losing its colonies as a result of the war. On the other hand, the Soviet delegate, Vyacheslav Molotov, proposed that the Soviet government should become the trustee of some of the colonies (especially Tripolitania), because it had wide experience in developing friendly relations with different nationalities. He assured his colleagues that ten years would be enough to prepare the area for self-government under Soviet tutelage. Byrnes, in a private meeting with Molotov, contended that the great powers should not create trustee administrations headed by individual governments. In addition, he touched on the self-determination provision in the Atlantic Charter and the concern that the Allies might be perceived as exploiting others in the region after their victory. The Soviet insistence complicated the Italian colonies issue and prolonged the discussions over the next couple of years.⁴⁴

On September 14, Byrnes proposed a plan for establishing U.N. trusteeships for all three former Italian territories in Africa. The proposal stipulated a ten-year

⁴³ James Reston, "U.S. Chiefs Divided on Italy's Colonies" *New Times*, September, 2, 1945, p. 15; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 45-46.

⁴⁴ Byrnes, *Speaking Frankly*, 94-96; Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 38-39.

administration over a unified Libya that would then gain its independence. The newly established U.N. Trusteeship Council would appoint a single administrator for each colony, which would be assisted by a seven-member advisory committee. Byrnes made a formal presentation of this U.S. proposal, asserting that the trusteeship and timetable for the independence for Libya would give heart to the world's people. Nonetheless, the London Conference, amidst conflicting opinions over and interests in Libya, failed to reach any positive decision over Libya. In the meantime, U.S. officials continued working on their trusteeship proposals, upgrading previous drafts until the early months of 1946.⁴⁵

On April 5, 1946, the United States presented its plan for U.N. administration of a unified Libya in a twenty-page draft agreement. It stipulated that the U.N. Trusteeship Council would, for a term of five years, appoint a chief administrator who must not be a citizen of one of the Council of Foreign Ministers' countries or of Italy. The chief administrator would hold full authority over Libya's internal and external affairs and would be assisted by an advisory committee composed of one representative each from Britain, France, Italy, the United States, and the Soviet Union as well as a corps of international civil servants whose loyalty was to the U.N. He would be responsible for forming an independent judiciary and police force to maintain order. The proposal also stipulated that Cyrenaica would become an autonomous Sanusi Emirate, also under the

⁴⁵ "Memorandum by the United States delegation to the Council of Foreign Ministers," in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, vol. II: *General: Political and Economic Matters* [hereafter *FRUS* with appropriate year and volume] (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 180; Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 39.

supervision of the chief administrator, who would serve as the territory's high commissioner. This was meant to satisfy Britain's promise to Sayed Idris Sanusi. Under this plan, the Trusteeship Council would assess developments in Libya and its capacity for self-government at the end of four years. This proposal, however, was not even formally considered by the Council of Foreign Ministers as a result of conflicts between the great powers.⁴⁶

The neighboring Arab countries also expressed their position on the disposition of the Italian colonies during the Council of Foreign Ministers' conferences, given their historical and geographic relations with Libya. More than any other country, Egypt was an influential factor in the development of Libyan-American relations. As soon as the council started its discussions in London, Egypt sent a memorandum explaining its position on the Libyan question. The memorandum insisted that the Council consider Egypt as an important country for Libya's future and suggested that a plebiscite be held in Libya to determine whether Libyans preferred independence or union with Egypt. While it stated its preference for a plebiscite, it said that any trusteeship should be administered by either Egypt or the Arab League, which had been established in March 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Syria to safeguard their independence and sovereignty. Abdul Rahman Azzam, the first Secretary-General of Arab League, circulated a memorandum to members of the Arab League largely reflecting the same views that Egypt had expressed to the council.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 50-52.

⁴⁷ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 46. For more details on Arab League position toward Libyan question, see Abdel Rahim Abdel Hadi Ali Abu Talib, *Aljameah*

The watershed for Libya's future came when the peace treaty with Italy was signed on February 10, 1947. The treaty required Italy to renounce all rights and title to its colonies in Africa and left the British military administration in power. The treaty also stipulated that any decision on the Italian colonies would be determined jointly by the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. The Council of Foreign Ministers was also required to make a final decision about the Italian colonies' future within a year of the treaty's ratification, which came into effect on September 15, 1947; in case the council failed to reach a settlement, the Libyan question would be submitted to the U.N. General Assembly. In a nod to the Egyptians, the council sent an investigative commission to determine the Libyans' desires. The committee's report showed Libyans' keen and unanimous desire for unity and independence and to be a member of the Arab League.⁴⁸

The peace treaty with Italy was largely a compromise and an effort to further delay a final decision. The Anglo-American allies were particularly concerned about the April 1948 Italian general elections and the danger of Socialists and Communists gaining additional power, which they believed could lay the groundwork for further Soviet influence. In other words, the Cold War increasingly factored into Anglo-American decision-making, especially after the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948. The United States also decided that protecting the Mediterranean from Soviet

Al-Arabiya Wa Qathayat Isteglal Libya [The Arab League and the issue of the independence of Libya] (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Nahdat Elsharq, 1997), 74-90.

⁴⁸ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 135-50; Mohammed Fouad Shukri, *Mild Daowlat Libya Elhadithah* [The birth of modern Libya], vol. 1 (Cairo, Egypt: All Press, 2012), 245.

influence was important enough to merit using its political and economic power to play a decisive role in the election through its support of the Christian Democratic Party.

Indeed, the Christian Democrats, led by Alcide de Gasperi, eventually won the elections that defeated the leftist wing coalition of the Popular Democratic Front, which included the Italian Communist Party and Italian Socialist Party. American foreign policy was also in a state of transition. President Truman had made his famous “Truman Doctrine” speech in March 1947, committing American resources to Greece and Turkey’s efforts to resist the spread of Communism.⁴⁹

In the light of these developments, the United States and Britain pledged not to make any public statements about the colonies without first consulting one other. The strategic benefits of Libya also played an increasing role in Anglo-American officials’ assessment of the situation. The country was described as the best aircraft carrier in Africa, referring in part to the U.S. base at Mallaha in Tripolitania (which later became Wheelus Field). Earlier, American uncertainty about the situation in the area had led the U.S. to offer to sell all of these facilities for a price of one million dollars. But the Americans experienced a quick change of heart. Mamdouh Haqqi, a Syrian writer then the head of the press in Libya, advised Ali Ben Ottoman, a prominent Libyan real estate dealer, to buy the facilities, so the two went to France to negotiate with the responsible American officials. But as soon as they arrived in France, the United States suddenly

⁴⁹ Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 101-11; James E. Miller, “Taking off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948,” *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 3 (January 1983): 35-39, 44-53.

withdrew all offers from international markets. Additionally the American government invested in maintaining the base facilities in 1948, spending over twenty million dollars.⁵⁰ Henry Villard, the first American ambassador to Libya, later confirmed America's uncertain intentions toward the base: "As late as 1947 there was no disposition on the part of the United States to expand, or even to continue, its interests in the place."⁵¹

However, the Communist take-over in Czechoslovakia in early 1948 and Britain's withdrawal from a number of international commitments galvanized an American commitment to Europe (most clearly represented by the Marshall Plan and creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—NATO—the next year) and to Libya. Mallaha emerged as a significant factor, as the British seemed increasingly averse to any future role in Tripolitania (though it still valued the strategic importance of Cyrenaica). Yet the British remained concerned about Soviet efforts to play a role in Tripolitania. John Utter, who represented the U.S. State Department on the U.N. commission of inquiry that had polled Libyans from November 1947 through May 1948, reported that Britain hoped for an Anglo-American partnership in Libya that would stabilize the situation in the Mediterranean. Key to these goals was the decision to abandon the possibility of returning Libya to Italy and the idea that the former colonial power would serve as a trustee over Tripolitania. J. S. Bennett, the head of International Relations Department in British Foreign Office, believed "the return of Italian settlers would inflame Arab

⁵⁰ Mamdouh Haqqi, *Libya El Arabia Kaienk Taeshow Fiha* [Libya: as if you live in it] (Damascus, Syria: Dar El Nasher Leljameen, 1962), 22.

⁵¹ Henry Serrano Villard, *Libya: The New Arab Kingdom of North Africa* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956), 137.

nationalism in Libya and would be a perpetual cause of friction in that part of the world.”⁵² His view was that if the Italians were allowed to return to Libya, British attempts to gain strategic rights in Cyrenaica would go sour. Therefore, Anglo-American policy toward Libya in 1948 changed decidedly and favorably through the Council of Foreign Ministers and the United Nations.⁵³

The Council of Foreign Ministers held its last session on September 13, 1948, just two days before the deadline it had set for itself to settle the fate of Libya else turn the question over to the U.N. The Soviet delegate proposed placing the colonies under U.N. trusteeship, assisted by an advisory board that would include the members of the Council of Foreign Ministers. Although Byrnes had introduced this same proposal three years before, the United States, Britain, and France now immediately rejected it as an impractical solution. The United States had abandoned any thought of collective administration since July 1948, when President Truman had approved the National Security Council’s NSC 19/1 as the core policy statement for American negotiators. NSC 19/1, in the beginning, also opposed immediate independence for Libya for fear that this weak state would allow Soviet interests and incursions into Libya, which was increasingly shaping up to be a theater of the Cold War in North Africa. Ultimately, the rejection of the Soviet plan pushed the issue into the United Nations, in keeping with the provisions of the 1947 peace treaty.⁵⁴ The Council of Foreign Ministers had failed to figure out the Libyan question as result of the Cold War confrontation between the

⁵² As quoted in Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 303.

⁵³ Louis, *British Empire in the Middle East*, 300-5.

⁵⁴ Bills, *Libyan Arena*, 148-54; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 57-62; St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 50.

United States and Soviet Union. The question now moved to the United Nations, also influenced by the Cold War through its members, and the U.N. played a crucial role in the creation of a new Libya.

The U.S. Position in the United Nations

Unlike the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Soviets did not have veto power in the U.N. General Assembly, where the Western allies were confident that they could easily reach the fifty-eight affirmative votes needed to obtain the two-thirds majority required for important decisions. After three years of delay as the Americans and Soviets had assessed and reassessed their interests, the Libyan question now moved forward, with the United Nations playing a crucial role in the fate of Libya. Not surprisingly, Cold War concerns were front and center in American foreign policy on this matter.⁵⁵

Originally, the Libyan question was supposed to be discussed in the third session of the U.N. General Assembly meeting in Paris, France, in September 1948, but a crowded agenda and limited time meant that Libya's fate was again delayed. However, it topped the agenda of the First Committee (Political and Security questions) at the second part of the third session that opened in Lake Success, New York, in April 1949. The First Committee's deliberations quickly revealed the different views of the great powers, especially the Soviet Union, toward Libya's future. The Soviet representative emphasized the importance of peace and security in Libya and stated that a precondition to such a state was the withdrawal of British forces from Libya. But Britain and the

⁵⁵ Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 74.

United States argued that to establish a U.N. trusteeship and maintain regional peace would be hard to accomplish through a U.N. administration alone, if British bases in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were gone.⁵⁶

The U.S. position in the United Nations gave paramount consideration to the desires of the inhabitants and to Libya's eligibility for self-government and independence, as a way of preventing any Soviet role in the area and of securing Libya's strategic assets for Anglo-American interests. Therefore, it ruled out the idea of international trusteeship that it had earlier favored. On September 6, 1949, the U.S. State Department's John Foster Dulles presented this position in his speech to the General Assembly's Political and Security Committee: "The inhabitants seem well advanced toward self-government and independence, and we believe any assembly decision should put the primary emphasis on achieving early independence." He also emphasized Libya's strategic location: "The relevancy of this area to international peace and security cannot be ignored . . . the future of Libya, indeed, intimately affects the whole strategic position in the Mediterranean and the Near East."⁵⁷ His address also had the added advantage of currying favor with the emerging Arab and Asiatic blocs in the new world organization.

The non-aligned movement headed by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sought to utilize the growing rivalry between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to the benefit of those new nations emerging from colonial rule. So the idea of Libyan independence

⁵⁶ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 150-51.

⁵⁷ As quoted in St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 51. See also Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 150-53.

resting with the General Assembly, a move that could speed decolonization elsewhere, was heady. On the other hand, Dulles' address did not rule out a continuing role for the pre-eminent colonial power—Great Britain. For example, Dulles also emphasized the British role in liberating Libya during the war and the British administration in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica throughout the 1940s, which gave it intimate knowledge of Libyan affairs and potentially made it eligible to administer all of Libya or at least Cyrenaica.⁵⁸ In the light of the Cold War, however, the United States in 1949 was reluctant about any form of the U.N. trusteeship, because such a plan would interfere with Washington's plan to develop a strategic air base at Wheelus Field in Tripoli. The administrator of a trust territory could not grant permission for any external country to establish military bases. Even in the case of "a strategic trusteeship," such as that enjoyed by the U.S. at the time in the formerly Japanese-held islands of the Pacific, this trusteeship was subject to a Soviet veto in the U.N. Security Council. As Villard (first U.S. minister to Libya) later summarized, "If Libya passed under any form of United Nations trusteeship, it would have been impossible for the territory to play a part in the defense arrangements of the free world. As an independent entity, Libya could freely enter into treaties or arrangements with the western powers looking toward the defense of the Mediterranean and North Africa."⁵⁹ So clearly, strategic interests—not some sort of disinterested concern with decolonization—were crucial in determining the U.S. position on Libya in the United Nations.

⁵⁸ Rivlin, "Italian Colonies and the General Assembly," 459-70; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 67.

⁵⁹ Villard, *Libya*, 33-34.

After the First Committee engaged in prolonged discussions but took no action on the Libyan question, a subcommittee was formed to study the issue and propose a resolution. Just as the subcommittee started its work, British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin and Count Carlo Sforza, the Italian Foreign Minister, made an unexpected announcement in London of an agreement between the two countries. The Bevin-Sforza Plan proposed a U.N. trusteeship for Italy over Tripolitania (starting in 1951), a British trusteeship over Cyrenaica, and a French trusteeship over Fezzan. The plan also stipulated that Libya would get its independence at the end of ten years. The plan was endorsed by the United States and Latin America members in the General Assembly as well.⁶⁰

The agreement was only a compromise between Western European countries; it ignored the Libyans' demands and therefore gained little support at the United Nations. The Bevin-Sforza Plan faced sharp criticism there from the Libyans, the Soviet Union, and Arab and Asian countries in the United Nations. Although the subcommittee approved the plan on May 13, 1949, the First Committee's vote showed only 14 in favor, 37 against, and 7 abstentions, which ended all any hopes of U.N. approval. Libyan local reaction toward the plan resulted in disturbances and angry protests in Tripolitania. Thousands of protesters flooded the streets of Tripoli objecting to the plan. They shouted and tore the U.S. flag in the front of the American consulate.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 128-29.

⁶¹ Ibid., 132; El-Hadi Ibrahiem Mesharqee, *Dekrayat Fee Nisef Qarun Min El-Ahdath El-Ajtimaia Wa El-Siyasia* [Memoirs of half a century of social and political events] (Tripoli, Libya: Markz Jihad Elibien Lelderasat Eltarikhiyah, 1988), 315-16.

U.S. support for the Bevin-Sforza Plan was an effort to prevent Soviet influence in Libya, which was its primary concern throughout the 1940s regardless of the national aspirations of the inhabitants. Warren Austin, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, argued that the plan was the best available solution at the time:

It had not been possible to find a solution which could completely reconcile the various proposals made. It was possible, however, to apply the trusteeship system of the United Nations. It was also possible to work out agreements designed to stabilize the rights of the populations concerned in accordance with the Charter and the peace treaty with Italy. [But] such measures did not constitute imperialism or colonialism, as it had been alleged.⁶²

Austin went on to justify U.S. support for the Bevin-Sforza Plan as a path to both independence and unity for the Libyans:

Independence will be attained in 10 years unless there are very strong reasons to the contrary at that time. Unity is arranged for in the recommendation that the powers charged with the administration of the three territories should take adequate measures to promote coordination of their activities in order that nothing should be done to prejudice the attainment of an independent and unified Libya state . . . the truth is that the formula of the resolution contains ample provision for working out the necessary machinery to achieve a unified state at the time of independence.⁶³

In sum, the United States seemed willing to accept any solution for Libya that would preclude Soviet influence and preserve its military bases, even if this meant ignoring Libyans' aspirations.

Consequently, the Soviet delegate accused the United States and its allies of having imperial intentions. For his perspective, this was clear from U.S. support for the Bevin-Sforza Plan and rejection of the Soviet proposal for a U.N. trusteeship. Responding to Soviet accusations, Dulles explained frankly in a press conference that

⁶² As quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 131.

⁶³ As quoted in St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 52.

while the United States had supported an international trusteeship proposal at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the international situation had shifted significantly since that time, especially marked was the increased tension between the countries of Eastern Europe and Western Europe. He also plainly asserted that the United States was concerned about its own interests before anything else; U.S. policy toward Africa in general and toward Libya in particular was and would be dictated by U.S. strategic interests in the region.⁶⁴

With the rejection of the Bevin-Sforza Plan in particular and trusteeship proposals in general at the United Nations, granting Libya independence increasingly seemed to be the only path that could satisfy Anglo-American needs. Independence would provide the United States and Britain another chance to prevent the region from falling under Soviet influence. Another advantage was that an independent country was also free to establish bilateral relations and agreements with other countries. Therefore, the United States and Britain declared themselves in favor of independence, despite the fact that both powers considered Libya as “backward.” So they suggested an interim period of three to five years during which the Libyans would prepare for self-government. On the other hand, the Soviet Union proposed immediate independence and the removal of all foreign forces and military bases within three months. The Arab and Asian countries also favored immediate independence. On October 11, 1949, a subcommittee of the First Committee was appointed to draft a resolution for Libya independence. The subcommittee held its meetings from October 11 through November 1, 1949. The draft defined Libya as

⁶⁴ Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 69.

consisting of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan and stated that it should receive independence as soon as possible and in any case not later than January 1, 1952.⁶⁵

On December 10, 1949, U.N. Assistant Secretary-General Adrian Pelt was appointed as the U.N. Commissioner for Libya. His fundamental task was to assist in drawing up a constitution and setting up the other infrastructure needed to establish an independent state. The General Assembly also provided for a ten-member Advisory Council, which consisted of representatives from Egypt, France, Italy, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States in addition to four Libyan leaders appointed by Pelt himself. On December 2, 1950, the National Assembly of Libya approved a fundamental law that provided the form of the new state based on federal and monarchical systems and that established the country as the United Kingdom of Libya, with Sayed Idris Sanusi serving as king. When the National Assembly completed the Libyan constitution under the supervision of the United Nations, independence was formally declared on December 24, 1951. From December 1949 through December 1951, the United States supported independence while continuing to work diligently to solidify its strategic position at Wheelus Field as much as it could before the independence date. Its goal—as always—was to preclude Soviet influence in the future and initiate a new stage in the new nation, as the next chapters will explain.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 134-35.

⁶⁶ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 54.

The U.S. Attitude toward Political Developments in Libya

In the light of the U.N. resolution on Libya, the United States determined its policy toward Libya based on two main objectives summarized in a telegram in early May 1950 from Secretary of State Dean Acheson to the U.S. Consulate in Tripoli: acquiring rights for Anglo-American military facilities and establishing an independent and sovereign Libya no later than January 1952. To accomplish these objectives, the “U.S desires [to] have so far as possible friendship, understanding and respect [of] peoples inhabiting Libya, of Arab States interested in Libyan problems, and of other members [of the] UN. We do not wish [to] have our true intentions, motivations or policy [to be a] subject of suspicion.”⁶⁷ The United States realized the importance of Libya’s location in the Mediterranean basin and therefore to its own interests in the whole region. Therefore the State Department was very concerned to achieve these objectives in a timely manner and to treat Libya as an independent state, thereby cutting off the road for Soviet attempts to expand its influence in the region.

Subsequently, the period from passage of the U.N. resolution through to Libyan independence in December 1951 was a crucial time for the United States (in conjunction with the British) to solidify its strategic rights at Wheelus Field and in Libya generally. Key to these objectives was both the Advisory Council of Ten,⁶⁸ which was often

⁶⁷ Telegram from U.S. Secretary of State to Consulate in Tripoli, May 5, 1950, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, vol. V: *The Near East, South Asia, and Africa*, edited by Herbert A. Fine, Lisle A. Rose, Joan M. Lee, John A. Bernbaum, Charles S. Sampson, Evans Gerakas, David H. Stauffer, Paul Claussen, and William Z. Slany (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 1621-22.

⁶⁸ The Council of Ten was established by the resolution of the U.N. General Assembly in April, 1950. It consisted of ten members (including the United States), and its mission was to aid and advise the U.N. commissioner, Adrian Pelt, in the creation of

referred to as the Council of Ten, and the interim Libyan Government,⁶⁹ which had been established by the National Assembly in March 1951. This interim government was to progressively take on administrative powers ahead of January 1952, in line with the U.N. General Assembly Resolution. Therefore, the United States closely followed the work of both bodies through its Consul-General, Andrew Green Lynch, who served as the interim Chargé d’Affaires in Tripoli until March 1952.

The United States played a very active role in the formation of the new Libyan state, despite its claims that it was simply working to see the U.N. resolutions implemented. However, it is clear from the historical record that the Americans worked to cultivate local leaders who it believed would be pro-Western and to isolate those leaders who seemed hostile to Anglo-American interests in the region. Secretary of State Dean Acheson raised internal political developments and the form of the Libyan state in several telegrams sent between 1950 and 1951. In February 1950, he worried that the division of responsibility between the local Libyan administration and the U.N. Commissioner was “not clear.” He also expressed the opinion that “establishment of autonomous” self-government in each of the three Libyan territories could be compatible with “a single state of Libya,” whose final shape (“whether unitary, federal, or confederal”) would be decided upon by “the peoples of Libya.” While he went on to hypothesize that creating such regional governments could “provide for corps of

the annual reports that he submitted to the U.N. Secretary-General. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 139; Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 202-14.

⁶⁹ The Libyan provisional government consisted of Mahmud al-Muntasir, Prime Minister; Ali al-Jirbi, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Umar Shinnib, Minister of Defense; Mansur Gadara, Minister of Finance; Ibrahim Bin Shaban, Minister of Communication; and Muhammad Bin Uthman, Minister of State. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 163.

constructive leadership . . . as distinct from present political orientation around leading personalities,”⁷⁰ it seems just as likely that the United States was interested in a relatively weak political entity that it could more easily deal with in the future.

The Department of State’s position on regional governments reached even to U.N. Commissioner Pelt, who was influenced by and agreed that such a federation might be the best solution, despite the fact that most Libyans desired a unitary—not a federal—state: “Commissioner in complete agreement [with] Department’s position re [regarding] federation as only practicable form [for] future United Libyan States. However, he is convinced sentiment increasing [in] all parts [of] Libya in favor [of] real unity and that people and leaders do not understand or appreciate [the] political concept [of] federation as being compatible with their ideas of unity.”⁷¹ The Department of State sought to reinforce this view by pointing out the formidable desert barriers separating Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan; the different modes of living in each area; and the traditional preference of people in some of these areas. However, it ignored factors speaking for Libyan unity, including language, shared social relations, and a history of shared struggle for sovereignty and independence.⁷² It is also possible that the United States supported the federal view with an eye toward dividing Libya into spheres of influence that it would share with Great Britain. Lewis Clark,⁷³ the U.S. representative in the United Nations’

⁷⁰ Telegram from U.S. Secretary of State to Embassy in Italy, February 11, 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, 5: 1604-5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1606.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1622.

⁷³ Lewis Clark had been assigned on April 3, 1950, to be the United Nations Counsel on Libya. See “UN Council on Libya,” *Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 563 (17 April 1950): 616.

council and on the Council of Ten, similarly promoted a model that established local institutions in all three territories. He argued that supporting local autonomy in the provinces would allow for broader governmental participation by all Libyans.⁷⁴

Part of the U.S. focus around the new state was ensuring that its government was established in a timely manner by the National Assembly drafting the constitution. To this end, the Council of Ten approved creation of a Committee of Twenty-One (seven members from each territory) in conjunction with the leaders of the Libyan political parties, including Bashir Sadawi, the head of the National Congress Party, which was the most influential party in Tripoli. This larger committee's task was to establish the National Assembly that would draw up the constitution of the new state. On August 7, 1950, the Committee established a National Assembly, consisting of sixty members (twenty representing each of the three territories). The fact that these members were appointed rather than elected became the subject of a heated controversy in both Libyan and international circles.⁷⁵

Pelt pointed out the challenges the National Assembly encountered in his report to the U.N. on the progress of constitutional developments in Libya. His report, which was discussed in the General Assembly in October 1950, highlighted the criticism of the appointments as the way of establishing the National Assembly, which was neither constitutional nor democratic. This prompted criticism from the Soviet Union that the United States had exploited its influence and worked to erode Libyan unity in order to

⁷⁴ Rivlin, "Unity and Nationalism in Libya," 31-44; Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 81.

⁷⁵ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 164-67.

promote U.S. interests in Libya; the Arab countries and Arab League criticized the slowness of the process and proposed to transfer power to the provisional government no later than April 1951. While U.S. delegation simply refuted the Soviet assertions and reiterated that its role was simply to assist and advise through its representative in the Council of Ten,⁷⁶ the United States was concerned that Pakistani and Egyptian criticisms might lead to a breakdown in the constitutional development process and delay the creation of state or even return it again completely to the United Nations General Assembly.

Furthermore, the U.S. consul (Lynch) believed that the Italians were worsening the situation.⁷⁷ In the previous Council session, the Italian representative had endorsed the Arab-bloc position within the Council and thereby “showed their willingness to fish in troubled waters”⁷⁸ To avoid future problems that could come from a “dangerous majority bloc” of Egypt, Pakistan, and Italy on the Council, Lynch recommended to his superiors to bring the “strongest pressure on Italy[,] pointing out that [a] breakdown [in] constitutional development and returning of whole problem to GA [U.N. General Assembly] would be damaging [to] interest [of] Western world as well as to Italian

⁷⁶ Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 85-86.

⁷⁷ Italy had some ambitions in the new Libya. It was the official policy of the Italian government that Italian national residents in Libya should become Libyan citizens so they could play a role after independence, but these attempts were denied strongly by U.N. Commissioner Pelt, who advised Italy to abandon such hopes. See Memorandum of Conversation by the Principal Secretary to the U.N. Commissioner on Libya, March 26, 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, 5: 1613.

⁷⁸ Telegram from the Consul General at Tripoli (Lynch) to the Secretary of State, November 1, 1950, in *ibid*, 5: 1635.

interests [in] Libya.”⁷⁹ So, the creation of the Libyan State was now increasingly vital to U.S. policy in the region.

George C. McGhee (Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs) viewed Libyan independence as boosting the prestige of the United States. He said, “Our prestige is probably higher in Libya than in any other part of the area, because of U.S. support of Libyan independence.”⁸⁰ In October 1950, the Libyan National Assembly was approved, and it held its first meeting on November 25, 1950, to enact two fundamental laws, which were regarded as necessary at this critical time for the future of Libya. The first law stated that Libya should be a federal state—as its first step toward a more perfect union—and that Sayyad Idris Sanusi should serve as King of Libya. Cyrenaican and Fezzanese representatives advocated these statutes, which were reluctantly accepted by the Tripolitaniens. Those from Cyrenaica and Fezzan feared that a unitary system might lead to domination by Tripolitaniens, as this region had the largest population; they had also advocated appointing an equal number of National Assembly members from each region (equal representation) rather than on the basis of population (proportional representation).⁸¹ These laws met with U.S. approval but faced criticism from both the National Congress Party and the Arab League. Because of that the United States endorsed constitutional developments by supporting efforts by the U.N. Commissioner and its Council. In other words, they saw political developments in Libya

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs (McGhee), September 15, 1950, in *FRUS*, 1950, 5: 1674.

⁸¹ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 168-69.

going well and moving toward the creation of an independent state and therefore sought to “climb on [the] band wagon.”⁸²

On the eve of Libyan independence, it was clear that Anglo-American plans—although the exact methods had varied throughout the postwar period—were on the verge of success. The Communist bloc did attack Britain, the United States, and France in the sixth session of General Assembly in December 1950, arguing that these countries had worked diligently to oblige the Libyan people to accept federation by dividing the new state into three spheres of influence. They also accused U.N. Commissioner Pelt of working on behalf of these Western countries rather than following his mandate to defend Libyan interests.⁸³ In fact, the United States had rather masterfully managed, especially through the U.N. Commissioner and its own representative on the Council, to help engineer a politically weak new state, taking advantage of Libyans’ eagerness for independence. An independent Libya would manage its own bilateral relations and would be free to negotiate military base rights with both the United States and Great Britain. As the Cold War geared up, Washington placed increasing weight upon the strategic value of these Libyan bases and on preventing a Soviet presence in the Mediterranean basin.

⁸² Memorandum of Conversation by the Deputy Under Secretary of State (Rusk), July 19, 1949, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949*, vol. IV: *Western Europe*, edited by David H. Stauffer, Frederick Aandahl, Charles S. Sampson, Howard McGaw Smyth, and Joan Ellen Corbett (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 569.

⁸³ Elkessee, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya*, 94.

CHAPTER III:

LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1951-1954

By the advent of Libyan independence, the United States was closely observing the political developments and waiting to take advantage of the new state by imposing a series of military treaties that the Libyans were obliged to accept. Nonetheless, the Libyans subsequently engaged in long and complex deliberations with London and Washington, proving that they were never simply agents for the West, as Nasserites claim. Instead, Libya's new leadership did their best—and did well—to deal with the realities they faced at that time.

Bilateral Military Treaties: The Temporary Agreement of December 1951

At the same time that Libya was developing its constitution with guidance from the United Nations and U.N. Commissioner Adrian Pelt in the period before January 1952, the United States carefully tried to figure out the best time to negotiate base rights in Libya—whether to push for those rights while it was still under the Anglo-French administration or to wait until after the country's declaration of independence. Pelt and the British initially suggested that the United States, Britain, and France's defense arrangements should be written into the Libyan constitutional arrangements that the National Assembly was drawing up,¹ but the United States rejected this idea. American

¹ Telegram from the Secretary of State to U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom, April 5, 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, 5: 1619.

policymakers feared such an arrangement would negatively affect U.S.-Libyan relations after independence. They termed it a “dangerous idea” and asked the British Foreign Office to eliminate it from the on-going discussions between Pelt and the Libyans.² Another concern was whether any such defense arrangement would have a legal basis: “We agree with Pelt that [the U.N. General Assembly would] have no legal basis to discuss defense arrangements and consider this question [should] be avoided altogether.”³ Because there was no legal way for the United States to maintain its military facilities in Wheelus Field through the General Assembly, Pelt suggested, on May 9, 1950, to U.S. Consul General Andrew Lynch that upon establishment of the provisional government (which hoped to start operations by January 1951), the governments of the United States, Britain, and France could then open separate negotiations with the

² Ibid. In the same context, Michael Wright, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Africa in British Foreign Office offered a new idea to the United States regarding the legality of their military presence in Libya. The idea was about including Libya in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which would presumably solve their defense problem by obtaining their rights through a multilateral arrangement rather than bilateral arrangements. Wright explained this idea would secure their base rights and strengthen the whole Mediterranean area. Moreover it would satisfy France, since it would simultaneously take care of French defense requirements in Fezzan and would be undoubtedly great for Italy, which wanted to be associated with defense arrangements with Libya. In fact, the United States accepted, in principle, the idea, but it, too, raised a number of problems, including how the U.S. would justify this addition to the Greeks and Turks, who had not been made full members of NATO. Additionally, it was questionable whether the Libyans themselves would want to be in a pact with Italy. Also unclear was how to finance this idea and whether France would want to include all of French North Africa in the organization. Therefore, the United States ultimately ignored this idea and sought different legal means for securing its base rights in Libya. See first secretary of the embassy in United Kingdom Palmer to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, November 15, 1950, in *FRUS: Near East, 1950*, 5: 1636-38.

³ Telegram from the Secretary of State to U.S. embassy in United Kingdom, April 6, 1950 *FRUS: Near East, 1950*, 5: 1619.

provisional government that would eventually enter into force once the country had obtained its independence. Lynch agreed with Pelt's suggestion, but he believed that there should be no connection between any economic aid or technical assistance that United States might provide to an independent Libya and the base rights. Lynch also believed that in any treaty, the Western governments should exercise control over the way that the money for base rights was spent, specifying that this money would have to be spent for education, public health, and agriculture and deposited directly with the central government, not with the governments of the territories.⁴ Indeed, Lynch's conversation with Pelt about base rights raised critical points that took a long time to resolve during Libyan-American negotiations after independence. The U.S. was especially keen to avoid any linkage between base rights and financial aid that could make the United States vulnerable to perpetual blackmail by new states. So, the United States encountered two key questions in its effort to achieve its military and strategic goals in Libya at the time: what was the optimal timing of the base-rights negotiations and how to disconnect obtaining base rights and providing economic assistance to the new Libyan government.

The United States wanted to negotiate a military base agreement before independence, at least with the provisional government, because the negotiating position of the Libyan government would be stronger after independence. Although, the Department of State had initially suggested that a temporary agreement could be negotiated with Britain and then subsequently concluded with the new state, until

⁴ Telegram from the Consul General Lynch at Tripoli to the Acting Secretary of State Acheson, May 19, 1950, in *FRUS: Near East, 1950*, 5: 1625.

September 1950, it had not envisaged negotiations over Wheelus Field, which significantly complicated American policy. Michael Wright, an Assistant Under-Secretary of State in British Foreign Office, noted in a memorandum on informal Anglo-American discussions that “it was U.S policy to maintain strategic facilities in Tripolitania. It was not yet clear, however, how we proposed to accomplish this.”⁵ George McGhee (U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs) believed it was appropriate for the United States to wait and see how the Libyan constitution would develop first: “We would probably want to reach some agreement with the Provisional Government of Libya for obtaining our base rights at Wheelus Field and subsequently to have this agreement ratified by the Libyan State. The exact form the agreement would take was not yet certain and would depend largely on future constitutional developments in Libya.”⁶ The U.S. Department of State was unsure about the best way to open negotiations because of Libyan constitutional developments and the need to coordinate with Britain (which was also working to advance its own military interests in Cyrenaica). In this context, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson asked on U.S. Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall in December 1950 whether, from the military point of view, the U.S. government should seek rights from the Libyan government directly or by way of a sublease from Britain, which still had administrative authority over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.⁷ But the State Department soon seemed to

⁵ Memorandum of informal United States-United Kingdom discussions in connection with the visit to London of Assistant Secretary of State George McGhee, September 19, 1950, in *FRUS: Near East, 1950*, 5: 1632.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5: 1632-33.

⁷ Letter from the Secretary of Defense Marshall to the Secretary of State, January 9, 1951, in U.S. Department of State. *Foreign Relations of United States, 1951*, vol. V:

abandon the idea of a sublease from Britain, which would again make the United States the target of significant criticism in the United Nations, especially from the Soviet bloc. On the other hand, Lynch advised the Department of State that an interim agreement with the Libyan provisional government before independence would have no legal status, because Libyan foreign affairs were reserved to Britain and France as the administering authorities. He strongly recommended direct negotiations between the United States and the Libyan government as the best method of securing base rights.⁸ For this reason, the United States realized it had to develop closer and stronger relations with the nationalist movement's leaders in Tripoli during the critical time of creating the Libyan state. This realization led to a number of official visits over the next two years to enhance these bilateral relations.

With this goal in mind, McGhee visited Benghazi, Libya, on September 18, 1950, for a meeting with Sheikh Mohammed Abdul As'ad Al Alem, the Mufti of Tripolitania and President of the Libyan National Assembly, who was drafting the constitution. McGhee's visit to Libya was proof of U.S. concern about Libya. During the long conversation between McGhee and the Mufti, the American emphasized that his government wanted to be a friend of the Libyan people and wanted to cooperate with them, offering suggestions about the best ways that the United States could help Libya. McGhee even framed U.S. retention of Wheelus Field in terms of the Libyans' best

The Near East and Africa, edited by William Z. Slany (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 1313.

⁸ Ibid.; Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, May 15, 1951, in *FRUS, 1951*, 5: 1322.

interests: “The American government is keeping it not with the aim of interfering in the affairs of the country, but . . . it is spending money on the Field which constitutes an asset for the country itself.” McGhee reported that the Mufti agreed and even considered that the Libyans “consider themselves lucky” to have a U.S. force nearby, “because the enemies of Libya would never dare to attack the country for fear of their American friends.”⁹ While McGhee might have exaggerated the Mufti’s enthusiasm, these conversations and the modified U.S policy toward Libya helped bring the two sides closer. Such interactions also help explain Libyan willingness to side with the West in the early stage of development of this new state on the stage of world politics. Indeed, the Americans seemed to be guaranteeing support for the country’s constitutional development as well as its future independence, because they were aware of the importance of Libya to U.S. policy. At the same time, Libyans did not want to be on a collision course with the West at this moment when the new nation was just developing its government.

Such sentiments among the Libyans do not appear to be limited to the Mufti. The U.S. representative on the Council of Ten, Lewis Clark, also mentioned a Libyan willingness to negotiate on Wheelus Field among Tripolitanian leaders in his telegram from Tripoli on May 22, 1950. Clark reported that he had discussed Wheelus Field with various Tripolitanian leaders who expressed not only a willingness but also the hope that the United States would retain the field. In a subsequent conversation with the Emir, Idris Sanussi, on June 12, 1950, Clark mentioned the U.S. desire to remain at Wheelus

⁹ Memorandum of conversation by the Director of Office of African affairs E. H. Bourgerie and the Mufti of Tripolitania, September 28, 1950, in *FRUS, 1950*, 5: 1630-31.

Field. The Emir replied “without qualification” that he would “support and approve” any agreement that allowed the United States to remain at Wheelus Field, so long as it was negotiated with the provisional Libyan government and then approved by an independent Libyan government.¹⁰ Again, for the Libyan policymakers, Wheelus Field was increasingly seen as a guarantee of U.S. support for their national independence.

For the United States, it was also important to see the British secure rights in North Africa. In a Spring 1951 memorandum, Undersecretary of State James Edwin Webb assured the National Security Council (NSC) that the United States intended to negotiate strategic rights in Libya—like the United Kingdom had planned—following establishment of a provisional government in Libya by the National Assembly, which was scheduled to convene on April 1, 1951. He reassured the NSC that

the Emir and his leading supporters have indicated that they are ready and willing to reach suitable agreements with the United Kingdom and the United States regarding the continued use of military facilities by our respective armed forces. The Department of State, in consultation with the Department of Defense, is now working out the kind of an agreement we would need to have regarding our military facilities in Libya and will commence negotiations as soon as warranted.¹¹

Clearly the United States was looking for the soonest opportunity to sign the agreement with the new state and was cheered by the apparent willingness of some Libyan leaders to support these ideas.

¹⁰ Telegram from the Consul General at Tripoli (Lynch) to the Acting Secretary of State on May 19, 1950 in in *FRUS, 1950*, 5: 1626.

¹¹ Memorandum by the Under Secretary of State Webb to the Executive Secretary of the NSC Lay on April 30, 1951, in *FRUS, 1951*, 5: 1318-20.

When the provisional government was established in March 1951,¹² King-designate Idris Sanusi and Foreign Minister Ali Jerbi held conversations with American consul Lynch on May 29, 1951, confirming that the United States could open informal negotiations with a limited number of negotiators (two or three) in July (after the end of Ramadan). They indicated that the agreement could be signed immediately after independence. They also “talked of [the] benefit to [the Libyan] economy of base expansion, housing projects, runway extension, [and] money spent by Amer [American] personnel” in addition to the possibilities of Point Four aid.¹³ However, the Libyan government officials were insistent on receiving a draft of the proposed agreement and were concerned over the size of the team of experts who would arrive from the United States for negotiations. It seems likely that their willingness to accede to such an agreement quickly was seen as a necessary evil to maintain and guarantee independence. The King might have wanted to guarantee the nation’s independence primarily and to avoid a significant conflict with the United States over the next six months, which was a critical time for Libya. Good relations with the United States would also presumably secure U.S. support—both economic and political—for the near future.

In another telegram sent from Tripoli to the Department of State, Lynch again emphasized that the number of negotiators should be held to an absolute minimum, because the Libyans “had no corresponding experts to meet with such a group and took

¹² Mahmoud Muntasir as Prime Minister; Ali Bey Jerbi as Foreign Minister; Mansour Gadara as Finance Minister; and Amer Shennaib as Defense Minister, Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, interview by author, May 29, 2013, Al-Ashiq’s home, Tripoli, Libya, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author’s possession.

¹³ Telegram from the Consul General at Tripoli Lynch to the Department of State, 2 June 1951, in *FRUS: Near East, 1951*, 5: 1325-26.

the line that two or three American might sit down with [the Foreign Minister] in a friendly way to work [the] situation out.”¹⁴ Lynch also emphasized the need for an advance draft of the agreement as well as his fear that providing such a draft to the Council of Ten would make the United States subject to attacks from both political opponents in Libya and from the U.N. members. This fear was grounded in the fact that such pre-independence negotiations could well seem to be, at least in principle, an infringement on Libyan sovereignty and an expression of Anglo-American neo-imperialism. In fact although the Department of State emphasized the goodwill that the Libyan government held toward the United States, Lynch expressed his significant reservations about the Libyans’ understandable desire to see an advance draft of the proposed agreement as well as “time to study it”:

While I have grave doubts about [the] security aspect of giving them advance draft, I see no way out of it and feel that accurate Arabic translation [should] be prepared in Washington as neither Libyan Govt [government] nor this office has translators competent to perform a technical job of this sort. At present time translators attached to UN Comm [commissioner] for Libya are understood to be doing some of this work for Provisional Libyan Govt. I think it wld [would] be most undesirable to have any draft agreement exposed to UN employees of various nationalities and sympathies.¹⁵

The United States clearly wanted to exploit the pre-independence months to guarantee base rights as planned and while the king offered the opportunity of negotiations.

From the Libyan perspective, one can see this as a shrewd gambit by the Libyan king. First, he was negotiating a temporary agreement of not more than a year, which could then be extended or eliminated based on the country’s new constitution. Second,

¹⁴ Telegram from the Consul General at Tripoli (Lynch) to the Department of State, 20 July 1951, in *FRUS, 1951*, 5: 1332.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1332.

he was taking action (indicating Libyan willingness to negotiate) before the United States had formulated a firm foreign policy toward his country. But the King-designate had already developed a clear vision for Libya's policy toward the West in general and the United States in particular, which he shared with Commissioner Pelt:

Mr. Commissioner, you must never forget that Libya besides firstly being an Arab country also bordered on the Mediterranean. It has always been in touch with Latins and Greeks. Spiritually and politically our face is, of course, turned toward the East and in particular to the Holy Places of Islam, but materially we will always have close relations with the west. This means that of necessity our policies will have to travel the middle of the road.¹⁶

This means that the new leader was squarely facing the realities of the political and economic situation facing Libya, which dictated such a policy to build the country and maintain its independence.¹⁷

In August 1951, the United States started negotiating formally with the provisional government over a base-rights agreement. The State Department prepared the draft agreement and sent it on October 19, 1951, to the U.S. Consul in Tripoli (Lynch), who delivered it to Prime Minister Mahmoud Muntasir (who also functioned as the Foreign Minister under the Libyan system) a few weeks before independence. It called for an initial period of at least twenty years, renewable thereafter until one of the two sides gave notice of termination.¹⁸ Afterward, Muntasir complained to then-U.S. representative Henry Villard that Libya had felt pressured into signing the agreement on December 24, 1951, which was the same day that Libya declared its independence. The Prime Minister relayed that the Arabic translation of the agreement "had been handed

¹⁶ Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 515.

¹⁷ Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, interview by author.

¹⁸ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 65.

[to] him at [the] last minute prior [to] independence [and] was couched in language which would be ‘incomprehensible’ to laymen and in particular to members of [the Libyan] parliament.” He went on to lament that though he “had begged Lynch to defer signing for a few days in order to give opportunity for study and comparison,” the American “had insisted [the] agreement must be signed without fail [on the] night [of] December 24.” Similar pressure was coming from the British, who insisted on an “exchange of letters with United Kingdom on date set or else ‘there would be no independence.’” The only solace Muntasir could take was the pledge that he “could study [an] Arabic version later and make such mediation or correction as deemed necessary.”¹⁹ Despite these circumstances (or because of them), the agreement was signed by Muntasir and Lynch on the set date. The only concession to the Libyans was that the diplomatic correspondence suggested that the agreement was a temporary one that would be revised in accordance with the Libyan new constitution after independence. The circumstances of the agreement signing clarified that the United States and Britain were indeed acting more akin to imperialists than abiding by the high, idealistic principles they had proclaimed in the Atlantic Charter or before the United Nations.

While the circumstances leading to the agreement were not advantageous, there were a number of provisions that were intended to help the new state—in return for military base rights, which were clearly the price of independence. The agreement

¹⁹ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, January 12, 1953, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, vol. XI, part I: *Africa and South Asia*, edited by Paul Claussen, Joan M. Lee, David W. Mabon, Nina J. Noring, Carl N. Raether, William F. Sanford, Stanley Shaloff, William Z. Slany, and Louis J. Smith (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 569.

consisted of twenty-eight articles, which included a payment by the United States to Libya of one million dollars annually over the twenty years, in addition to reimbursing Libya an equitable amount of rent for the land use occupied by the base. The Department of State later revised Article VII, adding a provision for technical and economic assistance that could flow from the Department of State under the Mutual Security Act.²⁰ Furthermore, the State Department emphasized that there was no link between the financial aid and the rent paid for the base. But U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson also confirmed to Muntasir that no payment of financial aid would begin until the Libyan parliament and King had finally ratified the base agreement, because the United States feared a Parliamentary reaction against the agreement.²¹ On December 24, the United Kingdom of Libya proclaimed its independence. The United States government, of course, extended full recognition to the new state and elevated the American Consulate General to the status of a legation. President Truman sent a message of congratulations to King Idris of Libya, and Secretary of State Acheson sent a message to Foreign Minister Muntasir as well.²²

It is an inescapable fact that the temporary agreement of 1951 was an imperial policy, implemented against a weak Libya, and justified as a needed line of protection for the free world. Libyan policymakers were also well aware of their new state's stark

²⁰ Letter from the Acting Secretary of Defense William Foster to the Secretary of State, December 4, 1951, in *FRUS, 1951*, 5: 1365.

²¹ Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Consulate General at Tripoli, December 21, 1951, in *FRUS, 1951*, 5: 1367.

²² Department of State, "U.S. Extends Recognition to Libya," *Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 653 (December 1951): 1057.

economic reality, which meant the room for maneuvering was limited.²³ Therefore, Libyan foreign policy under Muntasir had to be very profitable for Libya and its independence. Clearly, however, the agreement infringed on Libyan sovereignty in several of its provisions. For example, Article XVI allowed the United States to “bring into Libya members of the United States forces” to whom “Libyan law would not operate or apply.”²⁴ Additionally, Article XIX of the draft enabled the United States to make “engineering and other technical surveys in any part of Libya.”²⁵ The most contentious article, which prolonged ratification of the final agreement, was Article XX, which made both U.S. military personnel and dependents immune “from the criminal jurisdiction of Libyan courts and in matters arising from the performance of their official duties from the civil jurisdiction of the courts of Libya, provided that in particular cases the United States authorities may waive such immunity.”²⁶ Finally, Article XXV excluded all base-related “service and construction material, equipment, supplies, provisions and other goods, imported into Libya by government of the United States of America or its contractors” from both Libyan inspection and custom duties.²⁷

This agreement did not require the approval of the U.S. Senate, but it did require ratification by the Libyan parliament, where it faced intense scrutiny. The initial opposition of parliament obliged the Libyan government in August 1952 to ask the

²³ Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, interview by author.

²⁴ Defense use of facilities in agreed areas in Libya: agreement and memorandum of understanding between the United States of America and Libya, U.S. Department of State, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, vol. V, part III: 1954 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 2460.

²⁵ Ibid., 2462.

²⁶ Ibid., 2463.

²⁷ Ibid., 2468.

United States to renegotiate some articles of the agreement, especially the duration of the agreement and the amount of financial compensation provided. Not surprisingly, the Libyan representatives wanted to shorten the duration and increase the financial compensation as well as provide some limits to Americans' freedom of movement throughout Libya and to place them under the jurisdiction of Libyan courts. Although the U.S. representative found the Libyan desire to renegotiate compensation "tantamount to blackmail and showing little change from Barbary Pirate tradition,"²⁸ such an interpretation glosses over the speed and force with the Americans had insisted upon in forging the draft agreement. Now, a combination of the Libyan insistence on renegotiating and U.S. unresponsiveness resulted in a complicated, long, and tedious series of talks over the final base rights agreement. It took until 1954 for both sides to agree to a twenty-year lease of Wheelus Field and Base.

The Deliberations toward the Wheelus Field Agreement of 1954

More than two and one-half years after the temporary agreement, the United States finally concluded a new agreement on base rights in Washington on July 20, 1954. The talks between 1951 and 1954 were very complex and difficult, demonstrating that although Libya was a weak new nation that leaned toward the West as the best source of protection and economic aid, national policymakers also clearly kept Libyan interests front and center and were not simply and unreflectively pro-Western. Additionally, in an

²⁸ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, June 12, 1954, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 588. See also *ibid.*, 9: 570-71; Al Hakim, *Muahadat Libya Maa Britannia WA Amrikah WA Fransa*, 79-85.

effort to remove the economic duress that the prolonged negotiations were causing and give the Libyan policymakers maneuvering room, Muntasir sought a loan from both Egypt and Iraq that could cover the government's budget deficit in the interim (agreements were concluded with Britain in 1953 and the United States in 1954).

Muntasir therefore in late 1952, the Libyan government dispatched Defence Minister Ali Jerbi to Egypt, which was now under the rule of Nasser. Jerbi met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fowzi in Cairo. Jerbi explained the real economic situation in Libya, which included a budget deficit of more than 3.5 million dollars, which effectively meant that Libya did not have the military forces needed to protect its homeland. As a result, there were still foreign forces on the ground who had been there since the Second World War. Then Jerbi inquired whether Egypt could provide financial aid or a loan to Libya of 2.75 million pounds sterling to cover his nation's budget deficit. Instead of answering, Fowzi referred Jerbi to a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) meeting with Mahmoud Najeb, president of the RCC, who turned down the request. He argued that since Egypt was still in the process of fully implementing its own revolution, it could not provide any such loan. He further advised that the Libyan government should rely on itself and run its foreign policy based on Libyan interests. The same answer later came from Nasser himself. Following the unsatisfactory conclusion of his visit to Egypt, Jerbi proceeded to Iraq. There he met with Abdel Ellah, Prince of Iraq, and various Iraqi officials. They similarly declined to provide either aid or a loan, since Iraq had already planned several major infrastructure projects, which had straitened its financial circumstances. Furthermore, Iraq suggested that there was no Arab country in a position

to assist Libya; it would have to figure out its problems based on its own interests and resources.²⁹

Libya's new government—receiving no support from fellow Arab nations—felt increasingly pressured to ratify an agreement with the Americans and/or the British. However, once more Muntasir sought aid (and maneuvering room from the Egyptians; he met with the Egyptian minister to Libya (Yahya Huqi) on May 26, 1953. Subsequently, hoping to preclude an Anglo-Libyan agreement, Nasser's government agreed that it would pay the budget deficit—but at too high a price of Libyan sovereignty. Although the Egyptian condition that none of the loaned funds would go to pay British employees in the Libyan government might have been tolerable, King Idris rejected Egyptian supervision of the Libyan budget—another condition from Nasser.³⁰ Ultimately, the Libyan government chose reluctantly to sign both agreements and to seek friendly relations with the West, which in turn it hoped would supply its basic financial needs due to Libya's strategic location. This shows that early Libyan foreign policy, toward the West in general and the United States in particular, was never simply pro-West. Instead, it was based on a realistic assessment of its situation, which included few financial or military resources and which did not include significant assistance from fellow Arab

²⁹ Mohammed Othman Assaid, *Mahatat Min Tarikh Libya: Mudakrat Mohammed Othman Assaid* [Stations of Libyan history: memoirs of Mohammed Othman Assaid] (Casablanca, Morocco: El Najah Press, 1996), 83-84; Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, interview by author.

³⁰ Wahbi Ahmed Al-Bouri, *Dekrayat Hayati* [Memoirs of my life] (Benghazi, Libya: Dar El-kutop El-Watnia, 2013), 110-15; Mustafa Ahmad Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History: The Memoirs of Bin-Halim* (London: El Jabha El-Shabia, 1992), 157; Administration for Revolutionary Guidance, *Haqeqat Idris: Watheaq Wa Sowar* [Idris's truth: documents and pictures], 511-12.

nations. Out of options, the Libyans simply chose the best available option from a very limited range, regardless of what its diplomatic or political preferences might have been.

The United States knew clearly what a stark situation faced the newly independent Libya, and it utilized that weakness to strengthen its own position in what it defined as negotiations for a key strategic asset. For example, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) assessed the political and economic situation in Libya in a September 1952 memorandum for the National Security Council's senior staff. That assessment emphasized that Libya was extremely poor and largely devoid of natural resources. More than three quarters of the population was engaged in agriculture, and while fisheries contributed ninety percent of the nation's exports, the income from this covered only about 45 percent of the cost of its imports, resulting in a very high trade deficit (it ranged between two and eleven million dollars in the years following World War II). Even with foreign assistance, the Libyan standard of living was one of the lowest in the Arab world.³¹ In terms of its human resources, the CIA emphasized the sparseness of Libya's population, its divisions (which were marked by "strikingly different attitudes and characteristics"), its general lack of education, and its pervasive political apathy.³² These created political problems internally, especially exacerbating the difference between the three provinces. The memorandum concluded that the new Libyan government would have to adopt a pro-Western orientation due to its need for aid and the strong ties developed with the British during the war, which it seemed to be trying to offset by

³¹ Ibid., 140-41.

³² Memorandum for the National Security Council Senior Staff, September 12, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 139-40.

strengthening relations with the United States.³³ With respect to the Arab world, the report explained, “Libya has only a slight relation, at present primarily cultural in nature, with Egypt and Arab states. The King and most Cyrenaicans fear the ascendancy of adjacent Egypt and have shown little desire to join the Arab League. Egypt itself apparently has ambitions to dominate the new Kingdom, though its influence has declined.”³⁴ This report accurately presented Libya’s weakness, which shaped much of its foreign policy during the 1950s and especially the base-rights deliberations, which nonetheless lasted more than two years.

After Libyan independence, the United States had hoped for early approval of the temporary agreement of 1951 by the parliament, but the Libyans had a different set of priorities. Parliamentary leaders focused exclusively on internal issues in its first session. However, the United States was aware of the possible public reaction against the foreign bases, which might embarrass the new government before the parliament. So, the State Department preferred not to reveal the draft agreement until the Libya government could persuade the parliament to authorize the agreement. Although the agreement was supposed to be introduced at the April 1952 parliamentary session, which was held in Benghazi, Muntasir told Villard that “he [Muntasir] wanted the ground to be carefully prepared before he asked the parliament to consider the U.S base agreement so that

³³ Ibid., 9: 141.

³⁴ Ibid., 9: 142. Egyptian desires could explain why the king and Jerbi welcomed Lynch’s proposal for establishing another base in Cyrenaica (Benghazi). However, some historians interpreted it as a special trust and extra flexibility from Libyan government toward the United States. El-Hasnawee, *El-Alaqa Al-Libiyah Al-Amrikiyah, 1945-1960*, 51-52.

nothing could prejudice its successful outcome.”³⁵ The Libyan government clearly feared rejection of the agreement by the parliament, especially by the members who opposed the government, such as Khalil Elgala (regarded as a competitor to Muntasir), as this would add political weakness to Libya’s already significant shortcomings in trying to handle Anglo-American demands.

Although Muntasir was likely genuinely concerned about parliamentary rejection of the agreement, he also used this potential rejection to strengthen his hand diplomatically, as he sought to increase the amount of compensation for the base from the one million dollars annually written into the agreement of 1951. After deferring the agreement from the first session of parliament, Muntasir responded to a November 1952 inquiry from Villard that while the “whole question of foreign agreements is delicate one,” the “sole difficulty is financial.”³⁶ Villard’s report, however, revealed that the United States faced its own “parliamentary” difficulties. The U.S. Department of State replied to Villard’s suggestion of how best to speed the negotiations by stating that there was no way to provide or agree to a higher level of payment, as it “would probably require informal clearances with appropriate congressional committee members” and would go against what had previously been identified as the maximum Libyan payment during the negotiations leading up to the draft agreement.³⁷

³⁵ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, March 10, 1952, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 542.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9: 543-44.

³⁷ Telegram from U.S. Consul at Benghazi More to the Department of State, August 7, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 545.

Nonetheless, Muntasir persisted. In August 1952, he informed the U.S. Consul in Benghazi that the Libyan government and parliament were both officially dissatisfied with the terms of the base rights agreement and therefore sought renegotiation of both the duration of the agreement and the financial compensation offered (both in terms of rent and economic aid). He explained that after advance consultations with members of parliament, “all of them had criticized govt. [government] on two points above mentioned.” He then went on to make a clear economic argument—supported by detailed economic reports—that the rent and aid provided under the agreement would have to more than offset the revenue that would be lost from not collecting customs duties, taxes, fees, and such based on an equivalently sized commercial enterprise. To do otherwise would be “poor business for Libya.”³⁸ Nonetheless, the United States hoped to get a different answer from the King and procrastinated in responding to Muntasir.

However, the Americans quickly found that the King and his Foreign Minister were united in their demands. In September 1952, the U.S. Consul met the King, expressing U.S. disapproval of the Libyan effort to increase the amount of compensation while delaying ratification of the agreement for months. He highlighted the benefits that would come with the agreement, including the possibility of future navy enterprises and Point Four aid. However, the King emphasized that the payment amount was too small to secure agreement in the parliament. While he stated that it had been his government’s intention to present the draft agreement at the last session of parliament, it had become clear “after sounding out sentiment” that to do so would have ensured its rejection. He

³⁸ Ibid., 9: 544-45.

particularly argued that members of parliament were aware that the United States “was giving so much more econ [economic] assistance to other Middle Eastern countries” that “they felt that Libya was not receiving [its] fair share.”³⁹ The U.S. consul left the meeting understanding that the King's position was identical those of both Muntasir and parliament; agreement would only come by increasing the payment. However, the United States still rejected these considerations. In the other words, there was no clear path forward in the negotiations.

Subsequent discussions between Muntasir and Villard only served to emphasize the differences between the two sides. The Libyans believed that the United States could afford \$2 million annually; they also thought that the duration of the agreement should be shorted to 5-10 years, but this issue was clearly secondary. As the Americans balked, Muntasir played on U.S. sympathies—“Surely you would not want to abandon Libya so soon”—while simultaneously stating that Libya could not afford to be “sentimental and give away US base rights.” Instead, Muntasir argued, “Libya’s poverty required the sale of its base rights at fair price to ensure its national survival.”⁴⁰ In October 1952, the State Department finally responded, simply stating that the Libyan government was misunderstanding the benefits that would be obtained and then confidently predicting that the draft agreement would be ratified. After all, the U.S. facilities in Libya were not a commercial enterprise but rather part of a defense effort benefiting Libya and all nations of the free world as well as the United States. Muntasir responded acidly to such blithe

³⁹ Telegram from U.S. Consul at Benghazi More to the Department of State, September 2, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 546-47.

⁴⁰ Telegram from U.S. minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, October 9, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 555.

disregard of his nation's reasoned argument, telling Villard that the agreement, in this case, would be rejected by parliament and that Muntasir would be impelled to resign, since members of parliament had clearly stipulated that additional compensation was needed before they could authorize the agreement.⁴¹ To the Libyan government, attitudes toward the collective defense of the free world were simply "sentimental," while money was about its national survival.

At this point, Villard clearly absorbed the reality on the ground and sought to fully inform his superiors of the consequences of not increasing the proposed compensation level. Muntasir emphasized several critical points that required U.S. attention:

if agreement submitted to Parliament without additional compensation it would incur defeat and [Muntasir] and his cabinet wld [would] be forced to resign. . . . End of Muntasir regime and removal of his pro-Western influence wld completely change [political] atmosphere in Libya. We wld thus have lost a friendly govt and still have no base agrmt [agreement]. . . . Even if we succeed in getting agrmt ratified under pressure from King or [Prime Minister], relations between Wheelus Field and Libyan Govt [government] wld probably become strained without additional compensation in some form. Numerous minor annoyances [could] assume major proportions, such as . . . recently expressed Libyan desire that no foreign military shld [should] be permitted in transit at Wheelus. If questions of this kind shld be seriously agitated, it might become necessary to negotiate entire base agmt under much more onerous conditions than before. Needless to say, an unfriendly or resentful attitude on part of Libyans wld make it difficult to proceed with plans for new mil [military] installations in other parts of Libya, even though agrmt gave US right to do so.⁴²

⁴¹Telegram from U.S. Consul at Benghazi More to the Department of State, September 2, 1952; telegram from U.S. minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, October 9, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 546, 553.

⁴² Telegram from U.S. minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, October 9, 1952, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 554-55.

Villard succeeded in making the U.S. Department of State more realistic about the Libyan situation and moved it toward adapting a new position to help bring the views of the two countries together.

Less than a month later, on November 4, 1952, the Secretary of State's response focused on determining the amount necessary to satisfy the Libyan government. However, the Department of State could not offer a specific sum and sought to supplement the one million dollars annually with aid through a different channel, such as a development bank or agricultural loan agency. At this point, the State Department accepted, in principle, the need for additional aid, but it insisted that Villard not identify a specific amount but rather inquire of Muntasir whether a promise of U.S. financial support for some worthy project might offset the need to raise the rent amount specified in the base agreement. However, State also instructed Villard that if the latter was not an option or if the domestic political situation worsened, he should let Muntasir know in an indirect or informal way that the United States would increase compensation.⁴³

Although the Department of Defense in cooperation with the Department of State discussed the necessity of increasing the payment from one million to two million annually (for twenty years) with representatives of the appropriate Congressional committees, the Department of Defense still wished obtain ratification for the "cheapest price possible" and preferred the payment to take a different form as well, such as a general economic development loan or the establishment of a new economic organization (as the Secretary of State had previously suggested). Furthermore, the United States

⁴³ Telegram from the Acting Secretary of State to the U.S. Legation in Libya, 4 November 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 556-57.

sought to stipulate that it would have oversight over the additional million per year to ensure that it was well spent.⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, the Libyan government rejected those different forms of aid, which could not be used to cover the nation's annual trade deficit. It also pointed out that the additional U.S. payment would help it limit British and French influence on the Libyan economy. Now, the State Department warned the Libyan government of the possible consequences of further delaying U.S. military planning in the area, hoping to pressure Muntasir and speed ratification of the agreement by parliament and also reflecting the realities of having a new administration in the White House. In this regard, the Acting Secretary of State pointed out that the United States might reassess both present and proposed commitments regarding military facilities and expenditures in Libya, which could result in a permanent diversion of funds previously ear-marked for such plans.⁴⁵

However, the United States modified this pressure when it realized that the Libyan insistence on modifying the 1951 draft agreement was supported by the British consultants in the Libyan government, who were also negotiating with the British government over base rights in Cyrenaica. This hidden competition between the United States and Britain had a positive side effect for the Libyan negotiations with the United States in this case.⁴⁶ In light of these developments, Villard and Muntasir agreed to study

⁴⁴ Telegram from the Acting Secretary of State to the U.S. embassy in the United Kingdom, November 6, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 9: 557-58.

⁴⁵ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, January 12, 1953; telegram from the Acting Secretary of State to the U.S. Legation in Libya, December 17, 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 565, 568-70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the original agreement and alter some articles before introducing it to the parliament. Subsequently, on 19 January 1953, the Libyan government informally introduced the agreement to members of parliament to learn their views. They were especially critical of the articles giving U.S. forces freedom of movement and freedom from the jurisdiction of Libyan courts, which they equated with a military occupation of Libya.⁴⁷ In this connection, the on-going Anglo-Libyan negotiations also played a role, as the Libyan politicians argued that “if Libya permits [the] United States to do as it pleases, Britain . . . will certainly expect similar treatment.”⁴⁸ Additionally, the deputies explained that the United Kingdom had been Libya's friend longer than the United States and had assisted Libya more than the United States, therefore Libya could hardly grant the United Kingdom less favorable consideration than the United States.⁴⁹ At this point, Villard believed that Muntasir was orchestrating the parliamentary reaction, which “makes more difficult our task of negotiating agreement suitable to United States. And it may well make it more difficult for us to obtain better terms than those given to British.”⁵⁰ Villard recognized his counterpart's skillful diplomacy. However, Muntasir's later resignation and subsequent developments, which changed the whole course of the negotiations, have distorted the way in which his role has been assessed over the past half century.

Another issue complicating the on-going negotiations was that the United States had been operating at Wheelus Field for more than a year since Libyan independence and

⁴⁷ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, January 21, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 571.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

had not yet made any payments to the government. While both Muntasir and Villard recognized that such a payment had been held up by the delay in negotiating a final agreement, it nonetheless became a sore point in the negotiations. Muntasir requested a one million-dollar payment as a sign of good faith as the negotiations proceeded.⁵¹ But the United States rejected such a payment both because the U.S. Congress would not authorize such an expenditure without an agreed and finalized version of the agreement and because the United States hoped that withholding both this and economic aid until after ratification of the agreement would speed the process. However, the Libyan government instead came to distrust American professions that they appreciated Libya's financial position and were entirely sympathetic to its need for economic aid. Muntasir now took the offensive against what he perceived as the inconceivable position the United States was taking. He asked Villard how his government could trust the U.S. government as they worked toward a final agreement if it was now declining "to pay for rights and facilities which it had enjoyed without interference over past years." He went on to say that the Libyan people could never understand such an attitude and warned that a U.S. failure to make retroactive payment would likely jeopardize the existence of the Libyan government.⁵² However, a breakthrough in the negotiations was on the horizon.

On May 28, 1953, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles visited Tripoli, Libya, as he wound up his Middle East tour that had started on May 9th.⁵³ Dulles's visit

⁵¹ Telegram from U.S. Minister in Libya Villard to the Department of State, April 1, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 572.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For more information on this visit see, Department of State, "Report on the Near East," *Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 729 (15 June 1953): 831-35.

changed the U.S. position on base-rights negotiations. In Dulles's conversations with Muntasir, the American focused on the mutual interests between the two countries and asserted that the United States would treat its friends fairly. He mentioned that mutual satisfaction should be the basis of any agreement. Muntasir explained to Dulles the reality of the political and economic situation that confronted Libya as a new state and of its need for foreign aid, which he hoped would be covered between Libya's agreements with the United Kingdom and the United States. The Libyan Foreign Minister then switched to the subject of communism in Libya in an effort to link Libya's need to improve the standard of living with the Secretary of State's outspoken anti-Communism:

Tripolitania, he [Muntasir] pointed out, unlike Cyrenaica, has a considerable foreign population and there is a constant threat of communist propaganda. The Libyan government has been well aware of the communists. Libya, however, has been able to confine communist activities in the country. The best way, however, to combat communist propaganda is to improve the standard of living of the Libyan people and eliminate hunger. To do this, Libya requires the assistance of the United States. One main feature of the United States policy is to raise the standard of living of peoples of the world.⁵⁴

As a result to Dulles's visit to Libya, the country now moved toward the top of the administration's agenda. He introduced the economic assistance issue to a meeting of the National Security Council on June 1st and urged prompt action to remedy the situation in Libya. U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower agreed with Dulles's view that the United States had to bring a quick conclusion to the negotiations with Libya. Therefore, Dulles urged Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson to make a half million dollars available

⁵⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Political Officer, Mark Dayton, at the Legation in Libya, May 28, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 164; Administration for Revolutionary Guidance, *Haqeqat Idris*, 512-21.

immediately from the Air Force budget to the Libyan government as an advance under the provisions of the proposed agreement (an amount that was soon raised to one million dollars).⁵⁵ Dulles believed “this action is necessary to break the present stalemate in the negotiations and will help pave the way for obtaining satisfactory provisions on those points of the proposed base rights agreement over which there is presently disagreement.”⁵⁶ In addition to the goal of a final agreement, the U.S. Secretary of State had become concerned about the possible resignation of Muntasir due to his perceived failure to bring about a positive conclusion to the negotiations with the United States. Dulles hoped that one million dollars would cement his Libyan counterpart’s position through the end of the negotiations.⁵⁷

Later that same year, on December 13, 1953, U.S. Vice President Richard M. Nixon visited Libya and played a crucial role in pushing the negotiations ahead positively. In Benghazi, Nixon met the King, Deputy Libyan Prime Minister Fathi Kekhia, Henry Villard, U.S. Air Force Colonel Rollen H. Anthis of Wheelus, and Palace Legal Adviser Awni Dijani, who served as interpreter. The King “stressed the friendly ties existing between Libya and the United States and explained that Libya was an ally of the United States in its search for peace and freedom in the world.” He also “referred to the strategic position occupied by Libya in the Mediterranean, which should make it of

⁵⁵ Memorandum for record by Special Assistant to the President Robert Cutler, June 16, 1953, National Security Council [hereafter NSC] staff papers (5716), box 21, Libya file, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas [hereafter DDEPL].

⁵⁶ Letter from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, June 3, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 574.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

special interest to the United States in its defense of the west.” Recognizing the delays that had plagued the negotiations, due primarily to “internal domestic factors,” King Idris nevertheless expressed the view that a satisfactory agreement could likely be reached “at an early date.” The King concluded his comments by stressing that Libya’s pressing economic needs meant that financial support would be an important aspect of any mutually satisfactory agreement.⁵⁸ Nixon responded that “he was gratified to learn of the Libyan attitude” and seconded Idris’ hope for a speedy approval of a final agreement, which would open the way for a U.S. Congressional appropriation that could improve the Libyan economic situation. The Vice President also “expressed sympathy with the problems and aspirations of Libya, recalling the early days of American nationhood when we ourselves had few friends or resources. He assured the king of the interest, friendship, and good will of . . . the United States.”⁵⁹ Villard was optimistic that this friendly interchange would hasten a final agreement.⁶⁰

The official visit also greatly enhanced U.S. prestige in Libya generally, paving the way for progress in parliament and the government. “It was particularly noteworthy from the local point of view that Libya was the only country in the Middle East or Africa at which the Vice Presidential party stopped. This fact made a deep impression on Libyans generally including the king, who were flattered that no other Arab country had

⁵⁸ Department of State, “Vice President Nixon’s Visit: The Meeting with the King,” a report from the American Legation in Tripoli to the Department of State, December 17, 1953, Central Files: 033.1100 NI/12-1753, no. 289, p. 1, U.S. National Archives, College Park, MD [hereafter USNA].

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

been included whether intentionally or not on the tour.”⁶¹ There is no doubt Dulles’s and Nixon’s visits to Libya in the same year gave the negotiations their biggest push since independence and allowed the United States to reconsider its position in the negotiations.

Under Secretary of State Walter B. Smith explained to Harlod Elstner Talbott, the Secretary of the Air Force, that the United States had shifted away from a rigid position with Libya for several reasons. First, this was part of a larger Eisenhower administration effort to “eliminate points of difference with the Moslem world, particularly in the case of needy and friendly countries such as Libya.” Additionally, although the State Department recognized “that the continued existence of Libya as a state depends in large measure on the early and successful conclusion of its base negotiations with the Allied powers,” this ironically gave the Libyans diplomatic leverage, “because of Egypt’s bid for a dominant role in Libya.” The administration therefore decided to drop its “hard-bargaining attitude . . . in the coming phase of the negotiation.” It also anticipated that “the degree of our future enjoyment of base rights will be in direct proportion to the degree of satisfaction which the Libyans achieve in the negotiations.”⁶² However, all of the hoped-for forward momentum quickly evaporated as the political and diplomatic situation in Libya shifted.

Both internal and external circumstances played a role. Internally, Muntasir took a vacation starting in September 1953, traveling to Europe due to his health and leaving Fathi Kekhia as the Acting Foreign Minister during his absence. However, opponents of

⁶¹ Ibid., 1.

⁶² A letter from the Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense Wilson, June 23, 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 574-75.

Muntasir exploited this opportunity by persuading the King to replace some ministers in the cabinet without informing Muntasir. When he heard about these changes, he considered them an infringement of the law and an effort to weaken his position in the government. Therefore, on September 18, he sent his resignation to the King, who did not initially accept it (he did so formally only on February 15, 1954). Idris then assigned Muhammed Saqizli the task of forming a new government, but it did not last four months (January 18-April 11, 1954) before he was in turn replaced by Mustafa Bin Halim,⁶³ who formed his government on April 12th, taking up the portfolios of both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.⁶⁴ Additionally, Britain signed an agreement with Libya in July 1953, which was sharply criticized by both Libyan and Arab newspapers and other media, especially in Egypt. This outrage against the British agreement obliged the United States to be more patient, waiting until the situation had quieted before restarting negotiations.⁶⁵

During Bin Halim's tenure, Libyan-American negotiations entered a new phase that helped to solidify the two nations' relations at all levels. The new foreign minister allied his views with the United States in seeing the 1954 agreement over Wheelus Field and Base as a way to stop Soviet penetration in North Africa.⁶⁶ Bin Halim believed that

⁶³ Mustafa Bin Halim completed the signing of the agreement of 1954 just three months after his visit to the United States in July 1954. Several allegations emerged in the general public that questioned his relationship with the Americans, especially after the discovery of oil. Laton McCartney's *Friend in High Places* accused Bin Halim of receiving a one-million-dollar fee from the U.S. Air Force for arranging the lease for Wheelus, according to former CIA officials. Laton McCartney, *Friends in High Places: the Most Secret Corporation and How It Engineered the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 146-50.

⁶⁴ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 237-46.

⁶⁵ Elkese, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya 1949-1957*, 154, 158.

⁶⁶ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 244-46.

establishing a firm and cooperative friendship with the United States would be more effective than Muntasir's efforts to play the British off against the Americans.⁶⁷ He justified this policy as the best way not only to obtain assistance for Libya's economic development but also to secure U.S. diplomatic support in solving Libya's pending issues with France, Italy, and neighboring powers.⁶⁸ As a result, the new Foreign Minister's negotiations with the United States were much less demanding than those that had marked Muntasir's tenure and that had paid significant attention to parliamentary satisfaction.

With both sides now earnestly seeking a final agreement, the United States was increasingly confident that it could reach this goal. Specifically, Lionel M. Summers, U.S. Consul at Benghazi, explained in a telegram to the State Department before Bin Halim formed his government on April 9, 1954, that the new Prime Minister was a "shrewd politician . . . authoritarian, ruthless, personally ambitious" who could be expected to "carry out King's wishes without regard for constitutional niceties" and to advance the base negotiations since he had already "shown himself cooperative and helpful in discussions to date."⁶⁹ However, some obstacles remained in the negotiations.

In an effort to move the negotiations forward in May 1954, the new government suggested solutions to the two main points of contention—the amount of payment and the question of jurisdiction. Bin Halim suggested that the issue of jurisdiction be handled in

⁶⁷ Oral history interview with Bin Halim as quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 253.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁹ Telegram from U.S. consul at Benghazi Summers to the Department of State, April 9, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 584.

the same way it had in the Anglo-Libyan agreement. In terms of payment, Bin Halim's initial gambit was \$15 million annually. Not surprisingly, the United States rejected both suggestions out of hand.⁷⁰ Increasingly, Bin Halim recognized "that time was not on our side at all": "Theoretically, we are right and we cannot allow the United States to continue using [Wheelus] Base without our acceptance and satisfaction. But virtually, we have neither political nor military powers to compel the United States to accept our demands or evacuate its forces from the base."⁷¹ The Americans had already reached much the same conclusion: "if Libyans refused [to] ratify agreement . . . Libyans could not throw us out."⁷² Bin Halim, recognizing his disadvantage, still sought to conclude an agreement at the earliest opportunity.

In the light of these developments, King Idris instructed Bin Halim to inquire whether Turkey would mediate to facilitate a conclusion to the negotiations. Turkey at the time had cordial relations with Libya and had shown sympathy toward the Libyans; additionally, U.S.-Turkey relations were very strong, and Turkey had successfully negotiated with the United States about bases in its own territory. Therefore, Bin Halim visited Turkey and explained the Libyan position to Prime Minister Adnan Mandries and Turkish President Jalal Bayer. The President pledged to connect Bin Halim with President Eisenhower, which resulted in Bin Halim's visit to the United States.⁷³

⁷⁰ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 182.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁷² The Ambassador in the United Kingdom Walter S. Gifford to the Department of State, 22 November 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 561.

⁷³ Bin Halim mentioned he had visited Egypt in June 1954, and when he returned via Turkey, he met with Abdel Nasser, explaining to him that Libya intended to sign an agreement with the United States due to the stark economic situation. He wanted to pave the way to lessen the expected Egyptian reaction. Abdel Nasser agreed with Bin Halim

In July 1954, Bin Halim visited the United States to negotiate base rights directly with U.S. policymakers. His delegation's visit lasted seven days (12-20 July)⁷⁴ and included three meetings with President Eisenhower at the White House, as well as meeting with Secretary of State Dulles, Vice President Nixon, Assistant Under Secretary of State Henry Byroade, and head of the U.S. legation in Libya Villard. At the first meeting with Byroade, Bin Halim outlined the Libyan position clearly. He stated "unequivocally that the U.S could be assured of a base agreement, that he had not come to haggle over a price and that the base agreement should be dealt with as a matter separate from Libya's needs for U.S economic assistance." However, he did emphasize that U.S. economic assistance would play a key role "in convincing Parliament and the Libyan people of the desirability of cooperating with the U.S."⁷⁵

Rather quickly, the two sides made progress on the issue of U.S. supervision of additional aid to Libya. In response to Eisenhower's assurance that "we will foster care of the Libyan economy as the United States did with the Filipino economy,"⁷⁶ Bin Halim suggested the establishment of a joint council to supervise U.S. economic assistance—including the rent of the base—as a way to guarantee the money was spent to develop the

and encouraged him to conclude the agreement, because the United States could help Libya and might help Egypt by helping with the Anglo-Egyptian renegotiation to end the 1936 agreement regarding the British presence in Suez. Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 171-73, 83-87.

⁷⁴ The Libyan delegation was headed by Bin Halim and included Ali Aneizi (Minister of Finance), Suleiman Jerbi (Assistant Foreign Minister), Mohieddine Fekini (Executive Council of Tripoli), Fathi Kekhia (Libyan Ambassador in Washington), and Pitt Hardacre (British financial consultant in the Libyan government).

⁷⁵ Circular air gram from the Secretary of State to the Legation in Libya, 29 July 1957, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 593.

⁷⁶ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 190.

Libyan economy. The United States welcomed the idea of forming this council, which was called the Libyan-American Reconstruction Commission (LARC) and served as the official channel for U.S. economic assistance.⁷⁷

A subgroup of the Libyan delegation headed by Pitt Hardacre held two meetings focused exclusively on Libyan economic needs. Hardacre presented a long list of development projects with an estimated cost of \$55 million. However, he emphasized the five most urgent projects: development of the Benghazi harbor, development of the Tripolitanian power system, irrigation in Cyrenaica, irrigation in Tripolitania, and federal roads. He estimated these projects would cost \$10 million over five years, but Hardacre also sought U.S. economic assistance to underwrite the new Libyan government's banking system.⁷⁸

The United States concluded its negotiations with the Libyan delegation on July 20, 1954. In addition to accepting its needs for U.S. economic assistance, the memorandum promised to provide base rent of \$4 million annually for the years 1954 through 1960 and \$1 million annually for the next decade (1961-1971); \$3 million from the Mutual Security Program's fiscal year 1955 funds; and up to 24,000 additional tons of grain to meet Libyan deficiencies and help with its balance-of-payments difficulties. Additionally, the United States pledged to give sympathetic attention to Libya's future economic development needs.⁷⁹ While this agreement can be seen in positive terms

⁷⁷ Ibid., 192.

⁷⁸ Circular air gram from the Secretary of State to the Legation in Libya, July 29, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 592.

⁷⁹ Telegram from the Secretary of State to the U.S. Legation in Libya, July 20, 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 590.

(especially when viewed in terms of the total amount of U.S. dollars), Bin Halim had clearly abandoned Muntasir's policy of using the pressure of a British agreement and of Libyan Parliamentary and popular opinion at exactly the time that the United States had abandoned its hard bargaining. While we cannot know what a stronger Libyan negotiating stance might have garnered, it is clear that Bin Halim accepted an agreement that provided for much greater U.S. involvement in Libya's government than Muntasir would have allowed.⁸⁰

Subsequently, the agreement of 1954 included a preamble and thirty articles. Articles 26 and 27 had been altered from the draft 1951 agreement, and Article 29 was added to include a mechanism for resolving disputes between the two parties. With respect to jurisdiction, the United States accepted the phrasing from the British treaty, which stated "the United States military authorities shall have the right to exercise within the United Kingdom of Libya all criminal and disciplinary jurisdiction conferred on them by the laws of the United States of America over members of the United States forces,"⁸¹ including crimes against the property of the U.S. government. But in most other cases, the Libyan courts would exercise jurisdiction. The formal agreement was signed officially on September 9, 1954, in Benghazi, Libya, by Lionel M. Summers, U.S. Consul at Benghazi, and Ben Halim before being submitted to parliament for approval.

In Libya, Bin Halim tried to focus on the material advantages of the agreement to win over the parliamentary bloc that opposed the agreement, but he was also not above making political deals to accomplish his goal. When the four Tripolitanian members in

⁸⁰ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 253.

⁸¹ Department of State, *USIOT*, 1954, 5, Part III: 2463.

the Cabinet (Qalhud, Sarraj, Abdal-Salam Al-Busiri, and Bin Shaban) demanded that the government move the capitol from Benghazi to Tripoli in return for their support of the Wheelus Base agreement, Bin Halim agreed. The members regarded this move as a victory for Tripolitania and encouraged them to support the agreement in public.⁸² Nationalists also criticized the agreement through the newspapers, and the Egyptians reacted as if this agreement was the first step toward instituting Western control over one of Egypt's borders. Privately, however, Bin Halim had communicated Libya's stark economic condition to Nasser, who recognized the advantages that could flow to Libya from friendly relations with the United States.⁸³

On October 15, 1954, the U.S. Consul informed the State Department that the Libyan Chamber of Deputies had approved the base agreement by a vote of 39 to 12, with 4 abstentions, and two days later the Libyan senate also approved the agreement (by a vote of 15 to 4, with 5 abstentions). Finally, on October 20th, King Idris ratified the agreement, which came into force on October 30th, when the Prime Minister formally delivered a note informing the U.S. legation that the agreement had been ratified according to Libyan constitutional procedures.⁸⁴ The Department of State described the final agreement as "an important contribution to the defense of the free world" that had ushered in a new era in Libyan-American relations.⁸⁵

⁸² Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 256.

⁸³ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 170-71; Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, *Malafat El-Sues* [Suez files] (Cairo, Egypt: Al-Ahram Center for Translation and Publishing, 1986), 318.

⁸⁴ Telegram from the Secretary of State to the Legation in Libya, August 24, 1954, *FRUS: Africa, 1952-1954*, 11: 596.

⁸⁵ Department of State, "Base Rights Agreement with Libya," *Department of State Bulletin* 31, no. 795 (20 September 1954): 396-97.

Already on September 25th, the United States had announced that the U.S. legation in Libya had been elevated to the status of an embassy. On the same day, John L. Tappin, who had served as a liaison officer in North Africa during World War II and who was later active in administering the Marshall Plan, was appointed as the first U.S. ambassador to Libya. He presented his credentials on November 16, 1954, replacing Villard who had left in July to become principal political advisor on Near Eastern and African Affairs to the United States Delegation to the Ninth General Assembly of the United Nations. Villard had served as the U.S. Minister since the Libyan proclamation of independence. In a reciprocal manner, Mansour Fethi El-Kekhia was appointed as Libya's Ambassador to the United States; he presented his credentials to President Eisenhower on June 22, 1954.⁸⁶

Wheelus Field

Wheelus Field Base in Tripoli, Libya, was the keystone of U.S. policy toward Libya in particular and toward the Middle East in general in the early Cold War. Already we have seen how the negotiations about Wheelus Field helped define Libyan-American relations after independence. As the Cold War emerged, it was increasingly central to U.S. policies of containing and deterring world communism, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created a virtual ring of bases around the Mediterranean. Therefore, in this

⁸⁶ Ibid., 597-98; Department of State, "Legation in Libya Elevated to Embassy," *Department of State Bulletin* 31, no. 798 (11 October 1954): 544; idem, "U.S.-Libyan Negotiations," *Department of State Bulletin* 31, no. 789 (9 August 1954): 218; idem, "U.S.-Libyan Base Rights Agreement," *Department of State Bulletin* 31, no. 804 (22 November 1954): 792-93.

section, we will examine the history of U.S. involvement at Wheelus, as it went from being a key war-time post to an installation that the United States had considered selling outright during a postwar phase of demobilization before—in the wake of the Truman Doctrine, the Korean War, and NSC-68—it finally became a key Cold War military installation.⁸⁷ In the eyes of the U.S. military, the outbreak of the Korean War created additional imperatives to expand the American military presence overseas. This was especially the case as U.S. definitions of national security increasingly came to depend heavily on the U.S. Air Force's capacity against Soviet Union. Additionally, Libya was on the western border of Egypt and close to the Mediterranean installations in Greece, Turkey, and southern Europe. So, Libya become part of the U.S. plan to expand the air force's overseas capacity. The Corps of Engineers subsequently organized the Middle East District to manage U.S. military construction throughout the region.⁸⁸

Wheelus Field—then called Mellaha—was created in 1923 as an Italian Air Force base to complete and maintain its military occupation of Libya. The British Eighth Army captured it in January 1943 but then abandoned it ten months later in favor of Castel Benito Base, which was located 78 miles to the southwest. In May 1944, the Air

⁸⁷ Robert P. Grathwol and Donita M. Moorhus, *Bricks, Sand and Marble: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Construction in the Mediterranean and Middle East, 1947-1991* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History and Corps of Engineers, 2009), 1-2, 9.

The United States started demobilizing and dismantling the approximately one hundred military installations it had had in the Mediterranean and Middle East in 1945. It reduced its presence to 74 installations in 1947 and to fewer than thirty by 1949. This disinclination explained Mamdoh Haqi narration about U.S. announcement to sell whole facilities in Wheelus in 1947 and suddenly withdrawing all advertisements in 1948 Mamdouh Haqqi, *Libya El Arabia Kaienk Taeshow Fiha* [Libya: as if you live in it.] (Damascus, Syria: Dar El Nasher Lejlameen, 1962), 22.

⁸⁸ Grathwol, *Bricks, Sand and Marble*, 28-29.

Transport Command (ATC) and U.S. Army Air Corps planned to revitalize Mellaha as one of the key bases in its North African Division for war-time use given that it was vacant, it had a very clear climate (almost 364 days out of the year were suitable for flying), and it was located directly on the sea. Existing facilities provided permanent housing for 667 enlisted men; two hangars capable of housing C-46 aircraft, and one hanger capable of accommodating C-47 aircraft; two runways; and 25,000 square feet of shop space could be redeveloped.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, significant changes were still needed to bring the facility up to the needs of the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Soon Mellaha became an American installation. Colonel Paul O. Troxler of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was assigned in August 1944 to undertake construction at the base as Director of the American Middle East Theater (AMET). Less than two months later, Air Corps elements started moving into Mellaha from the British base at Castel Benito Base under the command of Colonel Theron B. Herndon. By April 1945, the ATC's 1262d Army Air Force (AAF) Base Unit was operating out of Mellaha under the command of Major Roy E. Brown.⁹⁰ On May 17, 1945, the name of Mellaha was officially changed to Wheelus Air Field in honor of ATC pilot First Lieutenant Richard E. Wheelus, who was killed while on a training flight near Abadan, Iran, on February 18, 1945. The size of the base increased from 315 acres to 1,264 acres; it eventually

⁸⁹ Robert L. Swetzer, *Wheelus Field: The Story of the U.S. Air Force in Libya: The Early Days 1944-1952* (n.p.: U.S. Air Force Historical Division, Office of Information, n.d.), 1-2, 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

encompassed 3,400 acres by 1951, and as early as 1946, five hundred passengers and seventeen tons of cargo and mail were passing through the base each month.⁹¹

The British government had initially turned over the base to the United States' forces free of charge for the duration of the war only. This meant that new U.S. facilities on the base would carry with them no postwar rights of ownership or use. Therefore, the United States acquired the base from the British Military Administration. The purchase price included rental fees paid to the Italian owners who had sold their lands to the British, a lump-sum payment of just under \$350,000, and a yearly rental fee of \$1,220.96. Interestingly, the Americans could not buy the land outright, because Tripoli was a conquered territory of British, and its postwar designation was yet to be determined.

⁹¹ Mike Kruszka, "Base Traces History to WWII Needs," *Tripoli Trotter* 17, no. 5 (January 30, 1970): 3.

Such a view also meant that the United States was not making a permanent commitment in North Africa.⁹²

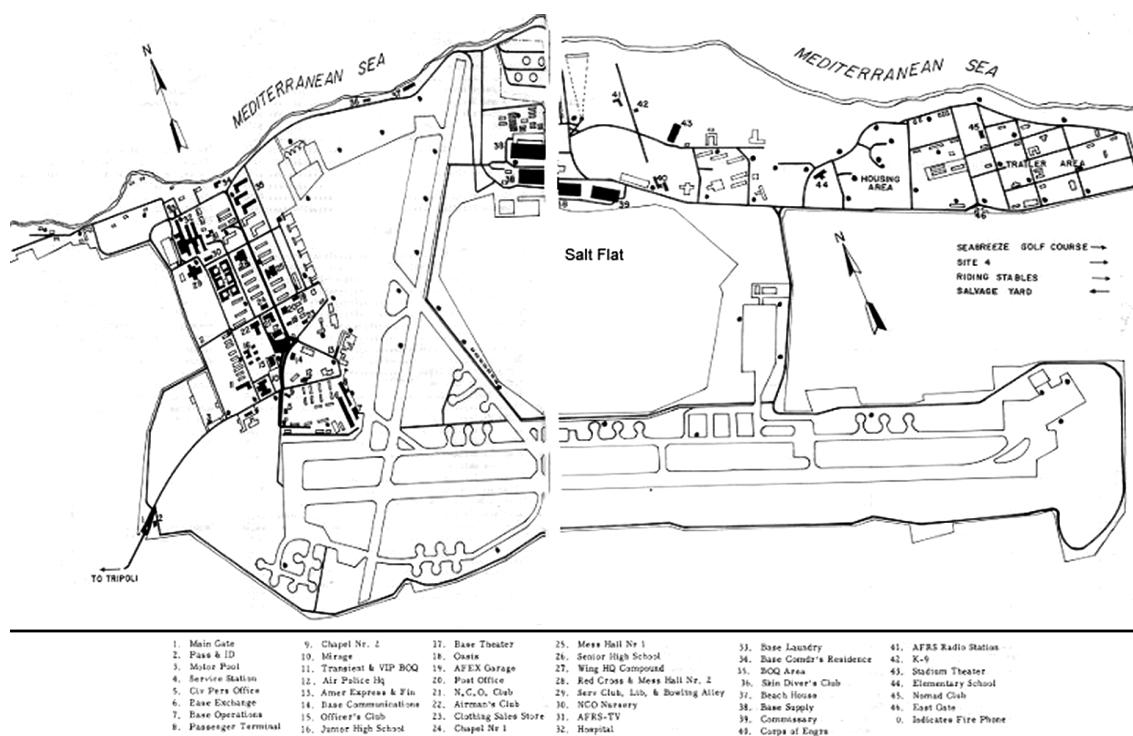


Figure 3: Wheelus Field Map⁹³

Indeed, after the war, the base fell into disuse. In February 1946, Wheelus Airfield was absorbed into the jurisdiction of Payne Field, in Cairo, Egypt, at the same time that it underwent a considerable reduction in personnel. As a result, by June 1949, air traffic in and out of the base had decreased by almost fifty percent, despite the fact

⁹² Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 8-9.

⁹³ Wheelus, "Photo Gallery," <http://wheelus.info/index.php/gallery/1-wheelus/detail/293-wheelus-base-map#> [accessed August 30, 2015].

that its strategic position between Casablanca, Cairo, and Rome made it an important communications hub. For this reason, an Airways and Air Communications Service (AACS) unit maintained the runways. But in May 1947, the base was deactivated. Its personnel and organizational mission were transferred to other European division bases, the field was declared surplus property, and all the facilities were altered for sale with a price set at one million dollars.⁹⁴

However, world events during 1947 led to rapid shifts in U.S. policy and renewed interest in Wheelus Air Field. Increasingly the base was seen in light of the ways in which it could serve as a base of operations for U.S. Air Force operations in support of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Its runways could be used to service transport aircraft carrying aid to allies in Greece, Turkey, and Iran who were struggling against communist encroachments. So, in January 1948, the U.S. Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) were assigned the task of reopening the base, which was soon renamed Wheelus Field.⁹⁵ By July 1948, Wheelus included air base, medical service, air transport, airways and air communication service, weather, air rescue and naval communication units. Twice-weekly flights came from Tripoli; Nicosia, Cyprus; Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; Tehran, Iran; Athens, Greece; Rome, Italy; Marseilles, France; Frankfurt, Germany; Port Lyautey, French Morocco; Lajes Field, the Azores; Newfoundland, Canada; and Westover Air Force Base, Massachusetts. Wheelus was playing a solid role in supporting

⁹⁴ Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 9-11; Kruszka, "Base Traces History to WWII Needs," 3.

⁹⁵ Kruszka, "Base Traces History to WWII Needs," 3; Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 12-14.

other air force agencies.⁹⁶ But in the early 1950s, under the command of the Military Air Transport Service (MATs), Wheelus Field's role was largely limited to service transport, such as refueling and transporting military material.⁹⁷ This makes sense in light of the unsettled disposition of Wheelus as Libya strove for its independence. In January 1953, the base reverted again to USAFE and its mission expanded with the conclusion of the preliminary agreement between the United States and Libya.

Date	Officers	Enlisted	Total military	Civilian/local
2 Oct 48	98	718	816	729
30 Dec 48	122	705	827	770
30 Jun 49	141	893	1034	671
31 Dec 49	137	861	998	---
30 Jun 50	154	841	995	513
31 Dec 50	292	1307	1599	528
30 Jun 51	249	1903	2152	627

Figure 4: Assigned Personnel at Wheelus⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 15-18.

⁹⁷ Oral history interview of Eugene G. Clayton (who served with the 34th Radio Squadron Mobile in U.S. Air Force Security at Wheelus Field from 1950 to 1953) by the author, Red Carpet Hotel: Endicott, NY, March 27, 2014, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's possession.

⁹⁸ Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 18.

In addition to its formal military strategic tasks, Wheelus also played an important role in Libyan-American relations through its personnel, facilities, and public programs, which helped establish the base as a new community (especially in the early 1950s), to improve the image of the United States for many Libyans, and to prepare the ground for the future of these relations. For example, in July 1948, Wheelus's chaplain, Captain Elmer Patterson, began to provide bread to a camp of destitute inhabitants in Tripoli. Patterson expanded the initiative by taking up collections every Sunday to build up a local relief fund that helped during the especially demanding periods of fall and winter when food was scarce. Arab officials subsequently honored these efforts with a dinner honoring Patterson as well as members of the British Military Administration. Following the arrival of Wheelus's first Public Information Officer (First Lieutenant H. H. McClure), Wheelus also hosted an Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) station that started in December 1950 to carry Arabic-language news broadcasts about Libya and the Middle East generally. Additionally, by 1950 the Wheelus information staff was collaborating with the local Arabic-language newspapers, resulting, for example, in a January 1950 article and picture showing a group of Libyan officials by MATS aircraft while on a goodwill tour of the base. Subsequently, a regular stream of news from Wheelus showed up in the local newspaper *Tarablus El-Gharb*.⁹⁹ All of this was clearly intended to improve relations around the immediate base area and to develop a positive image of Americans in general, especially once Libya gained its independence.

⁹⁹ Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 21-23, 25-26.

As Libya started its move toward independence, Wheelus became an important nexus for the work of both the new Libyan government-in-waiting as well as the U.N. Advisory Committee. In December 1950, sixty members of the Constituent Assembly of Libya visited Wheelus for a tour. They observed Libyans at work on the base, examined aircraft, and took pictures. The full account of this visit was published in *Tarabulus El-Gharb* newspaper. Then in early 1950, the Air Force Chief of Staff ordered Wheelus to provide a C-47 aircraft for Pelt and his staff to visit all parts of Libya. Wheelus then sustained the United Nations team in Libya. Indeed, members of the United Nations Advisory Council and its support staff had full access to Wheelus facilities, including the officers club, post exchange, base hospital, and commissary. Its clientele was not, however, limited to U.N. functionaries. In early 1951, Idris Sanusi, King-designate of Libya, was flown from Cyrenaica to Wheelus in a C-47 from the base, and he was subsequently the guest of honor at Wheelus Field on May 24, 1951.¹⁰⁰

After the period of uncertainty about the base during the elongated negotiations about Wheelus, the base entered a new phase in 1963 in light of U.S. military assistance to Libya. On August 22, 1963, the Royal Libyan Air Force (RLAF) was established at Wheelus Field in accordance with a military agreement in 1957 between the two countries (discussed in greater detail in the next section).¹⁰¹ Subsequently, Wheelus became an even greater asset to U.S. policies and interests in Africa and the Middle East. The base had grown rapidly from a simple refueling stop to one of the more essential links in the chain of U.S. military bases around the Mediterranean.

¹⁰⁰ Swetzer, *Wheelus Field*, 43-46.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

The Military Assistance Agreement of 1957

At the final meeting between Bin Halim and Byroade in Washington, DC, during the negotiations of 1954, the Libyan government expressed its desire to expand the Libyan army to five thousand troops if it could receive assistance from the United States. Byroade, however, merely responded “that we would study the proposal in light of our many commitments elsewhere.”¹⁰² Indeed, the United States at the time was fully occupied by its goal of attaining base rights. When there was no additional follow-up on this issue, Bin Halim established diplomatic relations in 1955 with the Soviet Union as an instrument designed to pressure the United States into providing military assistance promptly.¹⁰³

The Libyan government periodically renewed its requests for U.S. military assistance to expand its army to five thousand men. In early 1955, it stood at only 1,800 soldiers.¹⁰⁴ The U.S. ambassador to Libya, John Tappin, seconded the recommendation, arguing the need for “a Libyan Army adequate to ensure internal security and cohesion, on which the continued smooth operation of our military facilities depends.”¹⁰⁵ The U.S. State Department sought to accommodate the Libyan request to forestall Soviet penetration (most likely to come through Egypt) and persuade Libya of its enduring

¹⁰² Circular Airgram from the Secretary of State to the Legation in Libya, 29 July 1954, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 11: 594.

¹⁰³ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 193.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 226-27.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from the Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense Wilson, November 12, 1955, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 18: *Africa*, edited by Stanley Shaloff (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), 419.

friendship. To this end, Acting Secretary of State Herbert Hoover Jr. supported the idea proposed by the British military mission of a joint gift of military aid. The \$6.5 million gift would primarily provide military equipment.¹⁰⁶ The U.S. Department of Defense stipulated that such an expenditure required a signed bilateral agreement, as required by Section 142 of the Mutual Security Act of 1955. However, with such an agreement in hand, \$560,000 in military assistance could be provided to the Libyan Army in fiscal year 1956.¹⁰⁷

On 14 July 1956, the Libyan government—with all due fanfare—received an Anglo-American gift of a few armored cars, wireless/radio equipment, several cannons, and three service/repair trucks. The official ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Bin Halim, Libyan Minister of Defense Abraham Shaban, and U.S. Ambassador Tappin. Tappin delivered a speech that emphasized how the United States had fulfilled its promises to assist and equip the Libyan Army. He also pointed out that the United States and Britain were committed to ensuring the Libyan Army had the weapons needed to protect the homeland. In response, Bin Halim expressed his gratitude for this gift from Libya's friends, especially since it came without restrictions.¹⁰⁸ He also began to lay the groundwork for a bilateral military agreement with the United States, which would allow additional military aid to flow through the Mutual Security Act of 1954. The Department of Defense prioritized the Libyan agreement, because the United States was in “need of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 18: 420-21.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 18: 420-21.

¹⁰⁸ Elkese, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya 1949-1957*, 194-95.

such an agreement to protect Wheelus Base”¹⁰⁹ Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. Representative at the United Nations, expressed the belief that it was of key importance to prohibit Soviet activities in the region.¹¹⁰ The subsequent short, eight-article agreement restricted the Libyan government from using provided the weapons outside of Libya’s borders, instead using “this assistance exclusively to maintain its internal security and for its legitimate self-defense.” Libya also pledged not to “undertake any act of aggression against any other nation.”¹¹¹ The United States had effectively—through this agreement—obliged Libya to link its peace and security to U.S. security and interests in the region, effectively isolating Libya militarily from active Arab issues at time. Bin Halim, however, was willing to trade such freedom of action to obtain the ability to create a modern Libyan army that could at least protect Libya internally.

Therefore, on June 30, 1957, the agreement for military assistance was signed by Libyan Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Wahbi Al-Buri, and the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, John Tappin. Following on this, the United States appointed a military attaché as part of the U.S. embassy staff in Tripoli.¹¹² Bin Halim resigned not long after the agreement was concluded. While he could certainly point to both the Wheelus base agreement and the military agreement with the United States as achievements he had achieved, others questioned the value of these agreements and what they had cost the Libyan nation and people. While Foreign Minister Muntasir had been willing to draw out negotiations with

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum from the Representative at the United Nations H. C. Lodge to the Secretary of State on March 5, 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957*, 18: 440.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 18: 959.

¹¹² Al-Bouri, *Dekrayat Hayati*, 161.

the Americans in order to bargain for the best economic deal possible that cost the Libyans the least in terms of sovereignty, Bin Halim seemed much more intent on concluding agreements with the United States quickly and with little negotiation. This cooperative style made it easier for the Gaddafi regime to condemn the foreign policy under King Idris, but the historical reality—as revealed in this chapter—was much more complicated.

Libyan-American relations demonstrate how both the Libyans and Americans were each looking after their national interests primarily. This consistent search for the national interest was consistent even as the leaders of these states changed over time in both Libya (from Muntasir to Bin Halim) and the United States (from Truman to Eisenhower). Therefore, not surprisingly, national interest was the fundamental determinant in the foreign policies of both states. Indeed, during this initial period of Libyan-American relations, both governments were able to identify areas of mutual interest and work together in developing those. The Libyans gained needed economic resources and elevated their position in the universe of U.S. strategic interests, and the United States gained an important new base with some permanency.

CHAPTER IV:

EVALUATION OF LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1955-1959

The previous chapter covered Libyan-American relations primarily through the lens of military agreement negotiations, while this chapter shifts to an explanation of other diplomatic issues, which also influenced the military agreement negotiations, including the Point Four program, the Eisenhower Doctrine, Libyan-Soviet diplomatic relations, U.S. aid channels, Egyptian influence, and the discovery of oil. Those factors became integral parts of Libyan-American relations as each sought to determine and implement their policies toward each other through the 1950s and 1960s. Egyptian influence presented big challenges for both Libya and the United States, especially, but all of these factors help to explain how the United States carried out its foreign policy and how Libyan diplomats helped ensure that these policies were as beneficial as possible to their country and people.

Point Four Program

In 1949, the United States announced its Point Four Program to provide technical assistance and funds to countries that needed help with economic development, especially the new nations emerging from colonial rule. In this sense, Libya was a prime candidate, as it was emerging from Anglo-French administration following its colonization by Italy. Additionally, Libya—with its strategic position in North Africa on the coast of the

Mediterranean—offered opportunities to advance U.S. long-term policy goals in the region as the Cold War became hotter. For these reasons, on November 25, 1950, U.S. Ambassador Capus M. Waynick, Acting Administrator of the Point Four Program and American Consulate-General in Tripoli, announced that Libya—even though it was not yet independent—was eligible to receive technical assistance from the United States and laid out the general terms of the program:

The general purpose of the technical cooperation program in Libya will be to assist the efforts of the people to increase food production, reduce disease, raise educational levels, and otherwise improve living conditions. Under the general procedure of the Point 4 Program, the government of the United States is expected to pay the cost of sending to Libya technical experts in agriculture, water resources, health, and education, and of supplying equipment needed for demonstration or training purposes in case such equipment is not produced or available in the country. Libya will be expected to pay certain local costs.¹

Just over six months later, a Point Four general agreement was signed for Libya by the governments of Britain and France (on Libya's behalf) on June 15, 1951. Under the terms of the agreement, Libya was to receive \$150,000 to promote an agricultural education program and to carry out a soil and water survey.²

The agreement gave the United States considerable influence over the Libyan government that was then forming. Under the terms of the agreement, it would run through the end of 1951 or until Libya gained its independence, which was to occur no later than 1 January 1952 under the terms of the U.N. resolution governing the territory.

¹ Department of State, "Libya Included in Point Four Program," *Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 598 (18 December 1950): 974.

² Department of State, "Point Four Agreement with Libya and Eretria Signed," *Department of State Bulletin* 22, no. 7 (July 1951): 19; Department of State, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, 1954*, vol. II, part I (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954), 1226.

In other words, the United States was committed to the project only until a new Libyan government could be put in place.³ Additionally, the United States established the Libyan American Technical Assistance Service (LATAS), headed by a U.S. citizen who handled the Point Four budget and appointed staff and personnel “in consultation with the Libyan authorities.”⁴ That Libyan participation was organized as a Consultative Program Board that consisted of seven members: one representing the provisional government of Libya; one each from the three territories of Tripoli, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan; and one each from the governments of the United States, France, and Great Britain. Additionally, the Prime Minister of the provisional government, Mahmoud Muntasir, would serve as an ex officio member of the board.⁵

When Libya gained its independence, a new Point Four program agreement was signed on 21 January 1952 in Tripoli. According to the agreement, the United States, through the Technical Cooperation Administration of the Department of State, would provide the Libyan Government with approximately one million dollars over the course of the year to assist the efforts of the Libyan people in bettering their living conditions. The general purpose of the agreement was to improve agricultural production, improve health and sanitation conditions, develop water resources, and help the government establish the framework for a sound public education system. To these ends, John W. Jago, a career employee of the State Department, was to serve as director for the technical cooperation program, and Vernon D. Bailey, an extension specialist from the

³ Ibid., 1224.

⁴ Ibid., 1218.

⁵ Ibid., 1220.

Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, was to be chief of the agricultural improvement program; their counterparts would work in the newly established Libyan Public Development and Stabilization Authority and its corresponding finance corporation. Together, they would implement the country's development program.⁶

The new technical cooperation agreement included funds for agricultural development, education, health, natural resources development, construction and rehabilitation of buildings, and training, all of which would be channeled through LATAS.⁷ Subsequently, agricultural development funds went for programs of forestation, livestock improvement, agricultural extension, and agricultural research. In terms of natural resources, it worked on teaching construction techniques for low-cost irrigation canals, demonstrating improved irrigation practices, and developing flood control. Health programs focused on assisting the Libyan government to initiate a public health and environmental sanitation program and on providing technical training in health and sanitation to Libyan trainees. Educational funding went toward teacher training, libraries, vocational training facilities and programs, and the improvement of the national elementary school curriculum. The human impact of these efforts included the direct employment of two hundred Libyans in Point Four technical operations, on-the-job training for 150 Libyans, vocational training for seven hundred students, training for 150 Libyans in the Benghazi Trade School, and training for four hundred government employees and teachers. Additionally, 125 Libyan farmers received special instruction,

⁶ Department of State, "Agreement with Libya," *Department of State Bulletin* 24, no. 659 (11 February 1952): 218.

⁷ *USTOIA*, 1952, 3, pt. 3: 4329, 4332, 4335, 4338.

7,000 Libya farmers participated in agricultural extension activities, and 75 Libyan farmers traveled abroad for training.⁸ While these numbers might seem significant, the Libyans were disappointed by the U.S. contribution to Libya's national development, which was compounded by the dragging negotiations for Wheelus.

Libyan disappointment was part of the reason the Libyan government established relations with the Soviet Union in 1955, a move that alarmed the United States and hastened the conclusion of a new technical cooperation agreement on July 21, 1955, which was specifically identified to "eliminate causes for international tension."⁹ It seems that the United States was trying to reiterate its support for the regime with Point Four aid, which followed on the heels of a final resolution to the Wheelus Field issue. However, Point Four aid could not go to cover Libya's on-going budget deficit, its most pressing economic issue.¹⁰

U.S. Position on Libyan-Soviet Relations in 1955

In September 1955, the Libyan government announced that it was establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The announcement, which came through the Libyan ambassador in Egypt, alarmed the United States, as it was meant to do. The Libyans wanted to punish the Americans for their procrastination in meeting their

⁸ Report 1290D from U.S. Embassy in Libya to Department of State, 30 December 1956, White House Office (hereafter WHO), National Security Staff papers, 1948-1961, Operations Coordinating Board (hereafter OCB), Central Files series, box 51, DDEPL.

⁹ *USTOIA*, 1955, 6, pt. 2: 2232.

¹⁰ Pelt, *Libyan Independence and the United Nations*, 715; *USTOIA*, 1955, 6, pt. 2: 2231-36.

obligations toward Libya. The Libyans had other goals as well: First, formal relations with the Soviet Union would go a long way toward ensuring acceptance of the new nation as a member of the United Nations, which had been prevented by a Soviet veto three years previously. Second, this diplomatic initiative was meant to demonstrate Libyan independence and strength, especially as it faced sharp criticism as a “pro-Western state” in Arab circles. Third, Bin Halim clearly hoped to use this to leverage additional Western economic aid to counter Soviet offers of assistance that were expected to follow diplomatic recognition.¹¹

Bin Halim believed that U.S. enthusiasm to assist Libya had significantly diminished after signing the Wheelus agreement in 1954, despite Eisenhower’s pledges of “sympathetic consideration” to Bin Halim.¹² Specifically, the Libyan Prime Minister wanted to pressure the United States—using Soviet aid offers as leverage—to provide Libya with aid “without strings.”¹³ He turned up the heat by spreading rumors that the Libyan government might be contemplating giving the Soviets the right to fly through Libyan airspace and to explore possible petroleum concessions.¹⁴ However, he also denied those rumors when meeting with U.S. Ambassador Tappin in Tripoli. But now that he had the attention of the U.S. representative, Bin Halim argued that the United States had put him in an “impossible position vis-à-vis his council ministers, [the] Libyan

¹¹ Interview with Bin Halim as quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 261-63; Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya’s Political History*, 193; Despatch from the Embassy in Libya to the Department of State, November 30, 1955, in *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 422-25.

¹² Memorandum from the Representative at the United Nations Lodge to the Secretary of State, 5 March 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 441.

¹³ Telegram from the Embassy in Libya to the Department of State, 19 January 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 429.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Parliament and leaders [of] other Arab countries because of [the] failure [of the] U.S. to recognize and meet Libyan requirements” as Eisenhower had intimated with his promise of “sympathetic consideration.” He also pointed out that it was practically impossible for him to turn down Soviet offers of “both wheat and economic assistance ‘without strings’” while one million Libyans were destitute and many of the rest poor. This was especially the case when he could not counter with any clear evidence of support from Libya’s traditional allies.¹⁵ Bin Halim reminded Tappin that during his visit to Washington in July 1954 that he had been told that “it would not be necessary to haggle over details . . . [that] sympathetic consideration would be given to her needs.” Libyans believed that the “U.S. was failing to meet its moral commitments.”¹⁶

Eisenhower’s Operations Coordinating Board (which reported to the National Security Council and helped implement national security policies across executive agencies) soon was considering the situation in Libya. An evaluation from U.S. Air Force Brigadier General Dale O. Smith on February 2, 1956 assessed the situation: “The Libyan prime minister is playing footsie with the Soviet mission, and [is] acting cool toward our ambassador. . . . Libya’s attitude is frequently referred to as blackmail . . . but this not blackmail any more than is commercial trade and negotiation in the open market.”¹⁷ Instead, Smith blamed the State Department’s lackadaisical attitude, which did not take sufficient account of the importance of Wheelus. He went on to describe the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Dale Smith, U.S. Air Force Brigadier General, memorandum for NSC regarding U.S. policy toward Libya, February 2, 1956, WHO, NSC Staff papers, 1948-61, OCB, Central Files series, box 51, DDEPL.

base as “essential to the emergency war plan” and “one of the most strategic [Air Force] bases . . . in Europe and the Middle East.” Smith concluded that “We must keep it at all cost.”¹⁸ To that end, he suggested expediting fulfilment of all present U.S. commitments to Libya, finding ways to put political or economic pressure on Libya, and reviewing National Security Council (NSC) policy toward Libya.¹⁹

These points were seconded by Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. representative at the United Nations, who also blamed the State Department for creating an opening for the Soviets “to pry us out of North Africa” with offers of technical and economic assistance that the United States was not providing.²⁰ Such offers put the Libyan Prime Minister in an impossible position when “the United States has not done what it said it would do to help Libya get on its feet economically.”²¹ Lodge was especially worried that the 1954 agreement the U.S. had negotiated with Libya did not include a provision prohibiting the Libyans from allowing Soviet overflights. To remedy these oversights and ensure “the integrity of our base,”²² he suggested additional development aid of \$25-\$50 million, wheat on a continuing basis, technical assistance, and military assistance to bring the Libyan army up to 5,000 men.²³ Lodge became even more convinced that this was the best course of action after talking to Bin Halim’s opponents in the Libyan Parliament and to King Idris. The Libyan leader told Lodge that the best way to avoid Soviet penetration

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Memorandum from Representative at the United Nations Lodge to the Secretary of State, 5 March 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 440.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

was to increase assistance to Libya so that the Libyan people would understand the usefulness of cooperation with the West.²⁴

In response to Lodge's visit to Libya, the State Department instructed Tappin on March 13, 1956, to inform the Libyan government that the U.S. government was willing to provide an aid package meant to meet the Libyan government's requirements. This was intended as evidence of the strength of Libya's traditional friendship with the United States. The proposed aid package included a \$5 million grant, 5,000 tons of wheat to supplement the 7,200 tons already en route, \$7 million in economic aid, and military assistance to build the Libyan army to 1,000 men, in addition to on-going economic development aid. Additionally, Tappin was to inform the Libyans that the United States was considering constructing a new road from Wheelus to Tripoli as well as assisting in the expansion of Tripoli's power plant facilities.²⁵ In return, the U.S. government sought specific information about the Soviet diplomatic mission and specifically what offers of aid it had extended as well as what cultural centers, information offices, radio transmitters, petroleum concessions, and airstrips they had asked to establish.²⁶ Additionally, it sought a formal exchange of letters in which the Libyan government assured the United States that no such aid would be accepted nor concessions made.

While Bin Halim was willing to dispense with Soviet aid, he balked at the U.S. condition that "Libyan acceptance of economic, technical, and military assistance offers

²⁴ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 205.

²⁵ Letter from the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Murphy to the Ambassador to Libya Tappin, March 13, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 443-44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 445.

from other states will be limited to those which do not endanger U.S.-Libyan relations,”²⁷ because this seemed to imply that aid from one of the Arab states might be disqualified under this broad definition. Additionally, the type of formal written assurance that Tappin was requesting would require cabinet approval. He warned that the cabinet might consider such an assurance a “condition” for the “unconditional” U.S. aid and also might consider it an infringement on Libya’s sovereignty. Yet the United States insisted on such a written document to safeguard long-range relations between the two countries.²⁸

On April 20, 1956, Bin Halim sent a letter to Ambassador Tappin laying out Libyan intentions toward the Soviet Union. It clearly stated that the Libyan government would not take any action in the future that would facilitate Soviet penetration or jeopardize U.S. interests in Libya. Specifically in regard to the Soviet diplomatic mission in Libya, Bin Halim reassured the United States that this mission’s staff would be restricted to a normal size and normal activities. Additionally, the mission would not be allowed to open an information or cultural center, to establish nor operate a radio transmitter, to receive a petroleum concession, or to utilize the Libya’s air space. The letter also stated that Bin Halim’s government had rejected an offer of assistance from the Soviet Union and would not accept future offers unless they did not endanger Libyan-American relations.²⁹

²⁷ Memorandum of Conversation in Tripoli, 22 March 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 448.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 447-49.

²⁹ Letter from Prime Minister Bin Halim to Ambassador Tappin, 20 April 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 453.

Ultimately, Bin Halim considered this a success for his foreign policy. His gambit with the USSR had gained Libya both membership in the United Nations and some \$12 million in U.S. aid in addition to 25,000 tons of wheat. However, Libya's relations with other Arab states in the region were strained by these developments. Indeed, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia made offers of aid to the Libyan government in the hope that it would dispense with both U.S. and U.K. assistance.³⁰ Instead, the United States succeeded by having Bin Halim reject Soviet aid offers and provide written assurances that the Libyan government would protect U.S. interests across Libya. Bin Halim's successors would, to a certain extent, try to emulate his success, using Soviet offers as leverage to gain additional U.S. aid, especially during the subsequent government (1957-1960), when Abdel Majid Kubar was appointed as prime minister to succeed Bin Halim.

Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957

The Suez Crisis in the fall of 1956 (in which Britain and France conspired with Israel in a military intervention meant to re-establish European control of the Suez Canal) and its aftermath precipitated the decline in British and French influence in the Arab world and the corresponding ascension of Soviet influence, especially in Egypt. Therefore, U.S. policymakers recognized that the United States needed to fill the political vacuum in the region; otherwise it would be exploited by the Soviet Union. In fact, the United States had just concluded a new aid agreement with Libya to forestall Soviet

³⁰ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 198-209.

influence in that country. Subsequently, Eisenhower in January 1957 asked the U.S. Congress to give him authority to “co-operate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength for the maintenance of national independence” as well as to “undertake programs of military assistance and co-operation with any nation or group of nations which desire such aid.” If these steps were not sufficient, the President also sought authority to “employ armed forces to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of Middle East nations requesting such and against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.”³¹ Eisenhower’s address reached a receptive Congress that in March passed a joint resolution authorizing the President to act along the lines he had requested; it also authorized \$200 million for economic development in Middle East. This approach to the Middle East became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine.³²

In respect to Libyan foreign policy, the United States increasingly saw Egypt and Arab nationalism as a proxy for Soviet penetration in the country. American policymakers were concerned about the relative closeness between Nasser and Bin Halim, who met several times throughout the Libyan Prime Minister’s tenure.³³ For example, Herbert Hoover, U.S. Under Secretary of State, in November 1955 observed that “Libya, as an Arab state and neighbor to Egypt, is obviously susceptible to the

³¹ Department of State, “President Asks for Authorization for U.S. Economic Program,” 86.

³² Department of State, “President Asks for Authorization for U.S. Economic Program and for Resolution on Communist Aggression in Middle East,” *Department of State Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (January 1957): 83.

³³ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 73.

influence of Egypt and appears to be under strong temptation to adopt Egyptian tactics in the conflict between East and West.”³⁴ A National Intelligence Estimate in June 1956 evaluated Libya as “sympathetic with the anticolonial and anti-Western feeling of the Arab world, and subject to extensive Egyptian influence. Libyan leaders fear Egyptian domination and suspect Egyptian intentions, yet they will cooperate with Egypt in various policies, some of which are hostile to western interests.”³⁵ The Libyan government and King were indeed concerned about Egyptian influence across the country, but given the popularity of Nasser and his ideology, Libyan leaders had to carefully navigate public opinion in a way that allowed it the nation to remain independent of the Egyptian orbit.

In line with the new Eisenhower Doctrine, Vice President Nixon visited Tripoli on March 15, 1957, to exchange views with the Libyan government about U.S. aid and the security of Middle East. At a state dinner given in honor of Nixon, Bin Halim said that, after a very careful reading of Eisenhower’s statement, “he did not see how any Arab states could be opposed to the principles involved which seemed to him entirely compatible with Libyan foreign policy and the demands of the Middle East situation.”³⁶ The Vice President said “that he was most happy to hear of Libya’s endorsement of the principles of the Eisenhower Doctrine.”³⁷ Nixon then explained the philosophy behind it. Bin Halim concluded that Libya agreed with the doctrine in principle and would be happy

³⁴ As quoted in Bruce, *Libya and the United States*, 73.

³⁵ As quoted in *ibid.*, 73.

³⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Tripoli, 15 March 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 469.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

to discuss details with Ambassador James Richards,³⁸ Eisenhower's Special Assistant tasked with implementing the Eisenhower Doctrine—who was scheduled to arrive just two days later.³⁹

Richards spent three days exchanging views with Libyan government officials. Although Bin Halim accepted the doctrine as a matter of principle, he was displeased with the initial amount of economic aid offered to Libya, which was just four million dollars. Bin Halim emphasized that his government was under pressure—especially from the Arab press—which argued that Libya should reject the Eisenhower Doctrine since the United States had still not resolved outstanding issues in Algeria as well as other pressing issues of concern to Arabs in the region. After emphasizing the pressure his government faced, Bin Halim pointed out to Richards that his country was in great need of aid for economic development.⁴⁰ As Richards left Tripoli on March 20, 1957, they issued a joint communiqué that affirmed their agreement about the purposes of the Eisenhower Doctrine, reiterated that the United States was not seeking “to establish spheres of influence or special positions of power in the Middle East but is devoted to strengthening the nations of the area so that they may be masters of their own destinies,” and stated that additional U.S. economic aid was forthcoming.⁴¹ In response to his critics at home and

³⁸ Letter from Eisenhower to Special Assistant Richards, 9 March 1957, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-57*, vol. XII: *Near East Region, Iran, Iraq*, edited by Paul Claussen, Edward C. Keefer, Will Klingaman, and Nina J. Noring (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), 453.

³⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Tripoli, March 15, 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57: Africa*, 18: 469.

⁴⁰ Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 211-12; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 284-85.

⁴¹ Accomplishments of the Richards's mission in Libya: joint communiqué issued at Tripoli by the Government of Libya and the special assistant to the President on

abroad, Bin Halim subsequently justified Libya's acceptance of the Eisenhower Doctrine by pointing to the way in which it helped maintain Libya's independence of action as well as pointing to the additional economic aid that would flow to his country without further commitments.

Ambassador Richards also stopped in Tripoli on May 4, 1957, on his way back to the United States. Recognizing the value of Bin Halim's approval as well as the criticism he was facing, the special envoy added even more aid to the original pledge he had just made in March.⁴² The new aid went to a number of areas, which are identified below in Figure 5. They included new initiatives in broadcasting and telecommunications as well as new monies for development of the military, education, electrical power, and water supplies.⁴³ Now the Foreign Minister could deflect criticism by pointing to \$7 million in new U.S. economic aid (compared to the \$4.5 million offered on the first visit) that Libya had received in return for accepting the doctrine unconditionally. Following on the heels of the base agreement of 1954, Libya's acceptance of Eisenhower Doctrine represented the peak of the Libyan-American friendship.

problems of the Middle Eastern areas, March 20, 1957, in U.S. Department of State, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1957* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961), 836.

⁴² Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 211-12; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 285.

⁴³ Department of State, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1957*, 849.

	Commitments	Amount in U.S. Dollars
1	General survey of Libyan development needs	3,000,000
2	Development of broadcasting facilities	2,500,000
3	Assistance in educational system	1,500,000
4	Survey of Libyan police force and provision of equipment (\$20,000 in the first visit)	370,000
5	Domestic water supplies	150,000
6	Telecommunications	200,000
7	Additional financing for Tripoli power plant	1,000,000
8	A study of military requirements by Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) after signing the Military Assistance Agreement of 1957	1,000,000

Figure 5: U.S. Commitments to Libya under Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957⁴⁴

An Evolution of U.S. Interests, 1957-1960

In May 1957, the king of Libya accepted Bin Halim's resignation and appointed Abdel Majid Kubar to be Prime Minister (and serve as Foreign Minister), superseding

⁴⁴ Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs William M. Rountree to the Acting Secretary of State, May 8, 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 12: 531.

Bin Halim in that position. Although Kubar stated that he intended to follow a foreign policy toward the West along many of the same lines as Bin Halim had, Kubar leaned much more toward and was influenced by Nasserism. Another significant change to Libyan-American relations came with an announcement from the United Kingdom that it would reduce its financial obligations to Libya in 1958. Furthermore, the discovery of oil in the country in 1959 led to even more realignments.

On June 29, 1957, the National Security Council considered U.S.-Libyan relations specifically in light of the British announcement that it would reduce its assistance from \$12.6 million annually—making it the primary support for redressing Libyan balance-of-payments difficulties—to approximately \$3.5 million. The NSC expected a Libyan request to make up the resulting shortfall,⁴⁵ and it anticipated that

the Libyans will almost certainly make continuing efforts to raise the price of their cooperation with the United States. Should U.S. aid proposals fall substantially below their expectations, they would probably seek to revive U.S. concern that Libya would turn to Egypt and the USSR, though they would probably not accept substantial assistance from these countries unless they concluded that U.S. aid would be wholly inadequate.⁴⁶

So, at this time, the United States decided to expand its assistance offer to Libya but not so much that it would no longer need British aid. The United States desired to play an increasingly crucial role as British influence declined in the Middle East. Assessing the growing U.S. influence in Libya, the NSC was confident of its relations with Libya, especially in the wake of its strong public support of the Eisenhower Doctrine, and hoped

⁴⁵ National Security Council Report no. 5716/1, 29 June 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 493.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 493-94.

to maintain the North African nation's pro-Western orientation.⁴⁷ The State Department also added that American aid to fill the British gap was "essential if we wish to retain Libya as a site for our existing and proposed military installations and retain its beneficial influence . . . as a pro-United States and pro-Western nation" in the Middle East.⁴⁸

Even as the United States was becoming the preeminent force in Libya, it sought to ensure an on-going role for the British through tripartite negotiations with the Libyan government. In this context, U.S. officials sought an on-going British financial commitment at least through 1959.⁴⁹ Indeed, Secretary of State Dulles told Ambassador Tappin, "we cannot admit this as unilateral U.S. responsibility and we continue look to British to share this vital task with us to maximum extent possible."⁵⁰ Britain, however, sought to see "the United States . . . assume a heavier financial burden," and in September 1957, the British ambassador in Libya informed Tripoli that Britain was planning to withdraw its troops gradually from the country.⁵¹

The Libyans, however, pushed back and played an active and independent role in the subsequent Anglo-American negotiations about their future in Libya. In a conversation with the British Ambassador, Libyan Foreign Minister Wahbi Buri pointed to the impossibility of protecting Libya's frontiers with only the nation's army at the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 493.

⁴⁸ Memorandum from Department of State to NSC, 12 April 1957, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-62, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, box 21, file NSC 5716/1- U.S. policy toward Libya (2), DDEPL.

⁴⁹ For more information on Anglo-American coordination, see Blackwell, "Saving the King," 1-18.

⁵⁰ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Libya, 5 October 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 498-99.

⁵¹ Ibid., 493.

time, while he also asserted that Libya did not want to accept any military offers from elsewhere but rather needed assistance in developing its own officer corps. Further, when Kubar met with the British and U.S. ambassadors, he “immediately interposed strenuous objection to having Libya handed back and forth” based on Anglo-American whims. He angrily pointed to Britain’s legal commitments under the Anglo-Libyan treaty, which the British seemed poised to abandon. The Prime Minister went on to add that the very least the United Kingdom should have done is consult with its ally about such decisions that “so vitally [affected] her security and sovereignty.”⁵² Kubar was successful in pushing the hegemons back on their heels, which subsequently gave him a diplomatic advantage.

At this point, the Libyan government refused outright to be the subject of Anglo-American coordination and instead insisted on bilateral negotiations with both powers. As a result, the Libyan government was able to conclude negotiations with Britain first. King Idris urged Kubar to visit Britain in person. The negotiating delegation went to London in April 1958 to meet Selwyn Lloyd, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. In this meeting, Britain expressed its desire to reduce its financial commitments from four million pounds to one million due to its straitened financial circumstances, with increased aid from the United States filling much of the remaining Libyan budget deficit. However, the Libyan delegation’s instructions from the King precluded accepting such an approach; Kubar explained the King’s view that Libya would then be almost exclusively at the mercy of America alone and that the U.S. aid always had conditions attached.

⁵² Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 505.

Moreover, such aid did not come in cash directly (which helped to cover the budget deficit) like Britain's aid disbursements but rather through U.S. agencies, which were less reliable. At the end of the discussions, Lloyd agreed to reduce the British aid amount only from four million to 3.25 million pounds a year for the next five years (1958-1963). He also pledged to provide military equipment and training for the Libyan Army in coordination with the United States. These terms were in keeping with the Anglo-Libyan defense agreement of 1953, which stipulated that it be reviewed every five years.⁵³

While the Libyans could certainly be proud of having gained these concessions from the British, the United States did play a behind-the-scenes role in this. Secretary of State Dulles had already, in a telegram to Lloyd on November 21, 1957, urged the Foreign Minister to continue financial aid to Libya to advance their joint interests. He identified "the British position in Libya" as "a great asset for the west in a strategically important area." Giving due credit to the Libyans, the U.S. Secretary of State also pointed out that "all our reports emphasize the fact that the Libyans will react most adversely to a substantial decrease in your aid level" and that the Libyans greatly resented a joint Anglo-American approach that seemed as if "we are deciding among ourselves matters of vital interest to Libya and presenting that government with accomplished facts." Dulles also pointed out that the Libyans had reasons to favor aid from the U.K., which provided "a sense of certainty and continuity" that the U.S. annual appropriations process could not. He ended his telegram by identifying the desirability of the two allies

⁵³ See Bashir Elsuni, *Mudakrat Shad Ala Elahead Elmalakey Elibei* [Memories of a witness on the Libyan monarchy] (Benghazi, Libya: 17 February Library, 2012), 93-95; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 328.

working together in what he called a “coordinated separate approach” that the Libyans would not find as offensive.⁵⁴ The British also took into consideration the increasing influence of Egypt in Libya and the possibility that the country’s economy might collapse without the economic aid that the U.K. was providing. When Lloyd met Dulles on May 4, 1958, in Copenhagen for the ministerial meeting of the NATO council, he told his American counterpart about the hard bargain that the Libyan delegation had driven, which had led him to agree to grant Libya 3.25 million pounds annually in addition to providing the Libyan army with free training and light equipment. The American responded to that this was the “best news we had yet heard from anywhere.”⁵⁵ Presumably the Secretary of State thought that the Libyans had obtained most of what they needed already from the British before the Americans began their negotiations with the Tripoli government.

Already, Dulles had instructed Ambassador John Wesley Jones, his new Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Libya,⁵⁶ to begin discussions with Libyan Prime Minister Kubar as soon as possible. Time seemed to be of the essence, both because of the favorable climate created by the Anglo-Libyan agreement but also because the Americans worried that the Libyans would become even more intransigent once they

⁵⁴ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 21 November 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 507.

⁵⁵ Editorial Note, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960*, vol. XIII: *Arab-Israeli Dispute, United Arab Republic, North Africa*, edited by Suzanne E. Coffman and Charles S. Sampson (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 721.

⁵⁶ On February 5, 1958, the Senate confirmed John Wesley Jones as the U.S. ambassador to the United Kingdom of Libya. See Department of State, “Libya: Jones Confirmed as Ambassador,” *Department of State Bulletin* 38, no. 564 (February 1958): 318.

realized the implications of a recent oil discovery. However, the Libyans made clear from the beginning that they were seeking additional funding. They sought both an increase in the amount granted under the 1954 base-rights agreement as well as new development funding. In line with the first goal, Libyan Foreign Minister Buri visited the State Department in August 1958, seeking to increase annual payments above the \$4 million agreed-upon annual level and to extend them at this new level after 1960 (when they were otherwise scheduled to decrease to one million annually for the period 1961-1971).⁵⁷

For its part, the State Department was less concerned by the amount of U.S. compensation for Wheelus Field than with the danger that the United States might have to renegotiate the highly favorable agreement already in place. Therefore, Robert D. Murphy, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, recognized that even the difficulties of arranging an increase in funds was more than offset by the best interests of both the U.S. Air Force and American foreign policy more broadly. In his view, a reduction in payments in 1961 would result in a controversy that “could be very damaging to the rights we now enjoy. On the other hand, their acceptance of an offer which we made now would tend to reaffirm the validity of the agreements for the period after 1960.” Therefore the State Department approved maintaining the funds at a level of at least \$4 million through 1971.⁵⁸ So when Kubar officially requested, through Ambassador Jones, the opening of negotiations on the base-rights agreement, the

⁵⁷ Letter from the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert D. Murphy to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Sprague, September 20, 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 725.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 726.

American responded favorably.⁵⁹ Rather than risk a Libyan demand for renegotiation of the base agreement, it met the request for higher payments through its Mutual Security Program.⁶⁰ In addition, Jones informed Kubar on May 12, 1959, that the U.S. government was also providing an unrestricted, one-time payment of four million dollars in the current year “as a special indication of support for the government of the United Kingdom of Libya, without prejudice or commitment in regard to aid programs or procedures in future years.”⁶¹ The Department of State hoped to preempt further discussion or a thorough renegotiation of the Wheelus agreement in this way. It was also concerned that an oil strike recently made in Cyrenaica by Esso would make Libya financially independent of aid and correspondingly make “their attitude toward the base agreement . . . increasingly intransigent.” Washington concluded that “the only sound course open to us now is to respond as favorably as possible to the Libyan demands” to ensure “continued use of the air base before they become fully aware of their oil potential.”⁶²

At this time, the Libyan Parliament did want to see just such a thorough renegotiation, if not a termination, of the Wheelus agreement. Many believed that the level of foreign aid had to be raised to meet the level of benefits the United States had already enjoyed. Therefore, Kubar was in a critical position due to political and popular resentment of the base. Many Libyans near the base considered it a nuisance and a threat

⁵⁹ Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 727.

⁶⁰ Letter from Murphy to Sprague, September 20, 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 726.

⁶¹ *USTOIA, 1959*, 10, pt. 2: 2017. See also Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 328-29.

⁶² *USTOIA, 1959*, 10, pt. 2: 2017.

to their safety, especially due to jet fighters that approached landings or take-offs at a very low level over surrounding, populated areas. In addition to the danger of an aircraft crash into the neighboring city, some believed that the base made Tripoli a prime target in case of nuclear war between the United States and Soviet Union. Beyond these security concerns, some Libyan parliamentary leaders considered the base agreement an infringement on the nation's sovereignty, especially because the United States had almost complete freedom to operate Wheelus without any form of Libyan interference or obstruction. This seemed particularly chaffing with the awakening of Arab nationalism in Libya as a result of Nasserist activities.⁶³

On January 19, 1960, Kubar handed Ambassador Jones a detailed note explaining Libyan demands and his desire to review the 1954 base agreement, including annual payments, military jurisdiction, and customs exemptions. Recognizing that its effort to forestall such a renegotiation with the previous year's ready assent to increased payments had failed, the United States sought to define the upper limit of what it would provide in order to maintain Wheelus operations. Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon sought to hold the line at \$15 million annually in U.S. economic assistance to Libya, above and beyond the technical assistance program.⁶⁴ Going further, the Department of State approved this commitment in the form of cash payments under Mutual Security Program legislation when the Department of Defense stated that Wheelus was vital to the

⁶³ Letter from the Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy, May 22, 1959, *FRUS: 1958-1960*, 13: 732.

⁶⁴ Letter from the Under Secretary of State Douglas Dillon to the Acting Secretary of Defense James H. Douglas, March 26, 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 751.

operations of the Military Air Transport Service, the Strategic Air Command, and the U.S. Commander-in-Chief, European Command.⁶⁵

In the light of these developments, in April 1960 Ambassador Jones was authorized to begin negotiations on the use of the base and foreign aid at a rate of \$8 million per year and with an upper limit of \$12 million annually without further instruction from Washington, which saw \$15 million as the limit over a five-year term.⁶⁶ Libyan-American negotiations began on May 16th. Ultimately, the United States agreed to give Libya ten million a year in economic assistance through 1964 and one million per year from 1965 through 1971. These funds were “to be paid directly to the government of Libya for expenditure at its discretion, subject only to the conditions that such assistance will be used neither for the retirement of any debt of the government of Libya nor for the procurement of goods or services outside the Free World.”⁶⁷ The final agreement was written into an exchange of letters between Kubar and Jones on June 30, 1960. One letter covered the amended economic assistance agreement, and the other was a memorandum of understanding relating to problems arising from U.S. military operations in Libya. In the latter, the United States assured the Libyan government that it would continue to take all necessary precautions to prevent injury to Libyan lives and property resulting from base aircraft and equipment and that it would inform the Libyan government of these specific measures. The United States further affirmed that U.S.

⁶⁵ Memorandum on the Substance of Discussion at the Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Pentagon, Washington, April 15, 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 752.

⁶⁶ The Wheelus base negotiations agitated sharp debate in the Ethiopian Parliament that cause more difficulties for the United States there. See *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *USTOIA, 1960*, 9, pt. 2: 2148.

military operations in Libya in no way were or would be prejudicial to the sovereignty and security of the nation. In terms of the question of legal jurisdiction, the two governments agreed to establish a joint Libyan-American committee to which would be referred any problems that could not be settled through regular procedures.⁶⁸ These results were considered a big success for Kubar's government and clear evidence of its patriotism. Additionally, the financial aspects of the settlement helped the country solidify its budget and financial situation over the next five years as it adjusted to new oil income.

At the end of the 1950s, as the United States evaluated its policy toward Libya, it had some significant concerns about the future. Despite the success of the recent negotiations, King Idris was aging and in frail health. Additionally, the masses largely did not share the government's pro-U.S. and pro-Western orientation, and the Crown Prince, though he appeared friendly to the West, had little popular following in Libya. The issue of public opinion in Libya was closely tied to Egyptian influence, which played a major role in the country, much more so than the Soviet Union. Continued U.S. military activities at Wheelus Base and the presence of new American oil companies in the country provided ready fuel for Nasserist propaganda.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *USTOIA*, 1960, 9, pt. 2: 2627-28.

⁶⁹ OCB report on U.S. policy toward Libya, 5 November 1958, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-62, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, box 21, DDEPL.

U.S. Aid Channels

The United States sought throughout the post-independence period to manage the funds it granted to Libya for development purposes, as has been touched upon previously. The United States also saw these assistance agencies as giving legitimacy and visibility to its policies in Libya. For example, to improve the U.S. image among those in Libya, gifts of wheat were always presented to the Libyan people “as a humanitarian relief measure undertaken by the United States to alleviate famine conditions.”⁷⁰ But more significant over the long term were the three joint agencies with the Libyan government tasked with handling the U.S. funds. The first one, established even before independence, was the Libyan American Technical Assistance Service (LATAS) established to implement the Point Four program agreement with Libya in June 1951 by handling all the U.S. funds provided to Libya under this program.

More influential was the second such aid-administration agency, the Libyan American Reconstruction Agency (LARC). Flowing from the 1955 agreement about Wheelus Field, it administered the annual U.S. payments for use of Wheelus Field in addition to development aid, allocating the aid and executing agreed-upon projects.⁷¹ The Libyan Permanent Under-Secretary of Finance served as the chair of the LARC

⁷⁰ Memorandum of conversation between Prime Minister Bin Halim, Government of the United Kingdom of Libya, Ambassador John L. Tappin, American Embassy, Tripoli, Colonel William J. Cain, Jr., Base Commander, Wheelus Field, Tripoli, and David G. Nes, Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy, Tripoli, January 22, 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-57, 18: 432.

⁷¹ J. A. Allan, *Libya: The Experience of Oil* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 72; Bin Halim, *Forgotten Pages from Libya's Political History*, 192.

board (first Ali El-Sahli and then Abdel Razig Shagluf), which consisted of four other members: a Libyan representative from each province and an American representative who acted as advisor (Marcus Gordon). Most of LARC's early projects, undertaken later in collaboration with the Libyan American Joint Service (LAJS), focused on agriculture, natural resources, health, and education.⁷²

The third joint aid agency was the Libyan American Joint Service (LAJS). Created in 1955, it served as an adjunct to LARC to assist in implementing programs financed by U.S. funds. It primarily worked with the many American consultants brought in to advise on particular aspects of development, such as road construction and the expansion of electrical power facilities. The LAJS staff eventually reached approximately 2,000 Libyans, and its administrative budget exceeded five million dollars a year. Adding one more agency, the United Nations' technical assistance programs to Libya generally operated through the United States Operations Mission in Libya (USOM), whose personnel were either U.S. officials or private American consultants.⁷³

At the end of 1959, at the request of the Libyan government, LARC's operations were assessed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (more commonly called the World Bank) as part of a mission to evaluate the country's economic development. The mission reported several problems in the agency, which also help to explain why LARC faced on-going criticism from Libyans, including those in

⁷² Mohamed Yousef Al-Magariaf, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wal-Hadir: Safahat Al-Tarikh Al-Siyasi: Al-Huqba Ghayr Al-Naftiyya 1957-1963* [Libya between past and present: pages of political history: non-oil era 1957-1963] (Center for Libyan Studies: Oxford, Britain, 2004), 106.

⁷³ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 324; International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Economic Development of Libya*, 46-52.

government, parliament, and the press. Most significantly, although the United States had pledged \$55 million to Libya through LARC in the period up until March 1959, the agency had in fact received only \$40 million.

Sector	LD (Libyan currency)	\$	%
Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries	1,580,000	4,582,000	8
Water resources and minerals	1,556,000	4,512,000	8
Electric power plant	4,030,000	11,687,000	21
Telecommunication	1,850,000	5,367,000	9
Broadcasting	1,013,000	2,937,000	5
Roads	2,471,000	7,165,000	13
Education	2,639,000	7,653,000	14
Health including domestic supplies	1,584,000	4,593,000	8
Capitalization of national bank	700,000	2,030,000	4
Capitalization of national agriculture bank	1,000,000	2,900,000	5
Administration and miscellaneous	1,135,000	3,291,000	5
Total	19,559,000	56,000,000	100

Figure 6: Allocations to LARC by Sectors⁷⁴

⁷⁴ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *The Economic Development of Libya* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Press, 1960), 52.

The World Bank mission also revealed a catalog of other shortcomings. The report was especially critical of the “poor coordination between the work of the different foreign aid agencies,” the lack of a detailed economic justification for projects before they were undertaken, and a similar lack of evaluation of such projects’ economic impact on the country and its people. Ironically, this came at the same time that there was

much overlapping of technical investigations and research, a quite unnecessary profusion of experts’ reports dealing with almost every conceivable aspect of social and economic development and a conspicuous lack of central libraries or record offices where the results of the research work done in various fields before and since the war are available for reference. As a result development has proceeded in a rather piecemeal and haphazard fashion.⁷⁵

Moreover, in a special meeting convened by P. S. Narayan Prasad, the World Bank Chief of Mission, with Stephen Duncan Peters, the economic attaché in the U.S. embassy in Tripoli, Prasad expressed his disappointment and disapproval upon finding that Anglo-American competition for influence in Libya had resulted in U.S. and U.K staff members, through their distinct agencies (such as LARC and its British counterpart, the Libyan Public Development Stabilization Agency), seeking to discredit the people and methods utilized by the other side. Such competition clearly did not aid the cause of Libyan development.⁷⁶ As a result, the mission recommended disbanding such agencies and establishing a Libyan Development Council instead,⁷⁷ charged with overall planning and coordination of economic development programs. Indeed, the Kubar government in

⁷⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁶ International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Economic Development of Libya*, 50.

⁷⁷ The Development Council, which was purely advisory, was set up in June 1956 to assist in coordinating the work of economic development. See International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *the Economic Development of Libya*, 50.

collaboration with the Parliament in April 1960 disbanded all the former agencies,⁷⁸ and U.S. aid funds now were channeled directly through the Libyan Ministry of Finance.⁷⁹

In conclusion, the multiplicity of agencies and programs—some of them never carried out—clearly did far less for Libyan economic development than intended, despite all of the diplomacy and dollars that went into these programs. Rather, the poor performance of these agencies raised many problems for the Libyan government in the parliament and press about the efficacy of U.S. assistance to Libya, which endangered American policy in the country in general, especially given the growing Egyptian influence that reacted against anything related to the West.

Egyptian influence

Egyptian influence in Libya was the greatest challenge to Libyan-American relations for both governments throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This influence was the result of historical relations on all levels between the two North African countries, especially social relations. As a result, ties between these two countries and people were stronger than those with other neighboring North African countries (Tunis, Algeria, and Morocco) that were also pro-Western, especially Tunis and Morocco. The rise of Libya as a new state in 1951 coincided with the emergence of nationalism in the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular and attracted many Libyans who were enthusiasts and

⁷⁸ Al-Magariaf, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wal-Hadir*, 102-06.

⁷⁹ Mohamed Yousef Al-Magariaf, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wal-Hadir: Safahat Al-Tarikh Al-Siyasi: Al-Huqba Ghayr Al-Naftiyya 1957-1963* [Libya between past and present: pages of political history: non-oil era 1957-1963] (Center for Libyan Studies: Oxford, Britain, 2004), 106.

considered their nation's independence as a step toward the realization of their ultimate objective of full independence and close relations with the rest of the Arab world, especially after Libya joined the Arab League in 1953. Unfortunately for the new state, these enthusiasts frequently placed Arab nationalism above Libyan patriotism.⁸⁰ These Arab nationalists did not see the hazards that a pro-Arab, anti-Western foreign policy might present to their country—unlike the statesmen and politicians backed by the king who advocated an independent foreign policy for Libya. These leaders realized the stark realities faced by Libya as a new, poor, and weak country,⁸¹ and they saw Arab nationalism as a threat to Libyan stability, especially after 1952 when Nasser took authority in Egypt and adopted anti-Western policies. Part and parcel of Nasser's foreign policy was a prejudice against the region's monarchs that resulted in propaganda against the leaders of Libya, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. This antimonarchical policy was fully backed by the Soviet Union and became a double threat to Libyan-American relations.⁸²

Egypt used different issues, including the Palestine issue, to exploit the younger generation's enthusiasm and to agitate them against their governments. Nonetheless, the Libyan government was sympathetic with many of the anti-colonial and anti-Western feelings of the Arab world, including full support of Algerian independence, but it never went so far as to support Nasserism. This was reflected in the June 1956 U.S. National Intelligence Estimate, which observed that

⁸⁰ Mohamed Banon, interview by the author, Cincinnati, OH, January 6, 2016, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's possession; Mahmoud El-Duwake, interview by the author, Huntsville, AL, 2015, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's possession.

⁸¹ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 330-35.

⁸² Nichols, *Eisenhower, 1956*, 89.

Libyan foreign policy is likely to be ambivalent. The king tends to be pro-US, but his principal advisers and possible successors, including Bin Halim, are more opportunistic. Despite Libya's [dependence] on U.S. and U.K financial subsidies, it is sympathetic with anti-colonial and anti-western feelings of the Arab world, and is subject to extensive Egyptian influence. Libyan leaders fear Egyptian domination and suspect Egyptian intentions.⁸³

In the next year, a U.S. national security report pointed out that

Egypt has, since 1951, continuously sought to bring Libya into the Egyptian orbit. By supplying advisers and officials to the Libyan federal and provincial governments and teachers for the Libyan schools, and through the use of the Egyptian radio, movies, and newspapers, Egypt has spread Egyptian propaganda and influence in the country. The Egyptian embassy has aggressively tried to extend Egyptian influence and during the Suez crisis of late 1956, sought to foment disorders. The Libyan government and the king have become fearful of Egyptian motives and have initiated steps to counteract Egyptian influence.⁸⁴

Given this patently obvious Egyptian influence in Libya, the United States considered how best to proceed in Libya. Under Secretary of State Herbert Hoover in a November 1955 letter to the Secretary of Defense worried aloud that "Libya as an Arab state and neighbor to Egypt, . . . appears to be under strong temptation to adopt Egyptian tactics in the conflict between east and west."⁸⁵

In the light of the Egyptian influence, the United States was concerned with Nasserist activities in Libya and sought to counter Egyptian efforts that, of course, were against U.S. interests and policy in Libya in particular and in the Middle East and North Africa in general. For example, in 1956, the International Cooperation Administration pointed out to the White House that "one of the most effective means of Egyptian

⁸³ National Intelligence Estimate, 19 June 1956, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 455.

⁸⁴ National Security Council Report 5716/1, 29 June 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 492.

⁸⁵ Letter from the Acting Secretary of State to the Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson, November 12, 1955, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 419.

penetration in Libya has been through the provision by Egypt of some 700 subsidized Egyptian teachers for Libyan schools.” Further, these teachers had played a key role in promoting “civil disturbances,” which prompted the Libyan government to close all the secondary schools in Tripolitania. It now turned to the United States to “help recruit Arabic-speaking, non-Egyptian teachers to replace the Egyptian teachers and is considering the withdrawal of the approximately three hundred Libyans who are studying at the University of Cairo.” Seeking to displace this revolutionary influence, the United States instituted several education measures meant to replace the Egyptian teachers, to train Libyans (through scholarships) abroad (outside of Egypt), and to construct a teachers’ training college and English-language training program in Libya.⁸⁶

By February 1958, sixteen Libyan students who had graduated from the University of Cairo had arrived at American universities for one to three years of advanced study, and 22 students who had graduated from secondary school were sent to the U.K. for four to seven years of study.⁸⁷ In the same context, the United States asked its diplomatic missions in India, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Turkey to provide Libya with Arabic-speaking teachers, but this attempt was disappointing. The United States did successfully recruit ninety new Arabic-speaking preparatory and secondary teachers, most of whom were Palestinian refugees who were naturally Arab nationalists but less likely than Egyptians to act as agents of the United Arab Republic (UAR). However, a large number of Egyptian teachers still continued to be employed in Libyan

⁸⁶ As quoted in St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 73.

⁸⁷ OCB report on U.S. policy toward Libya, 12 March 1958, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-62, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, box 21, file: 5716/1- U.S. policy toward Libya, DDEPL.

schools, presenting a political challenge to both Libya and the United States.⁸⁸ The United States continued its efforts, and in 1957, it was able to recruit an additional 43 secondary-school teachers in Lebanon with the promise of more. Additionally, the Richards's Mission committed an additional \$380,000 for salaries, travel, and audiovisual material to further aid the process of replacing the Egyptian teachers.⁸⁹

In addition to the teacher replacement program, the United States also tried to counteract Egyptian influence in other ways as well. For example, it strengthened the radio signal in the Benghazi station. This was aimed at reducing the impact of the Egyptian radio stations, especially the Arab Voice. Additionally, the U.S. embassy in Libya did not allow students who received its scholarships to travel through Egypt or on Egyptian airlines, and it did not grant any scholarships to students who endorsed Nasserism.⁹⁰

The U.S. launched a parallel campaign in higher education aimed at limiting the flow of Egyptian professors into the country. In 1955, it sponsored staff and faculty members at the new Libyan university (later renamed Garyounis University). The experience of Dr. Majid Khadduri exemplified U.S. efforts in this context. He was sent to work at Libyan University as Dean of the College of Arts and Education in 1957 in the

⁸⁸ St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 74; National Security Council Report 6004/1, 15 March 1960, *FRUS*, 1958-1960: *North Africa*, 13: 743.

⁸⁹ OCB report on U.S. policy toward Libya, 5 November 1958, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-62, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, box 21, DDEPL; OCB weekly activity report, 16 September 1957, WHO, NSC Staff records 1948-61, OCB Secretariat series, box 8, file: OCB 319.1 activity report, (file #1) (3), DDEPL.

⁹⁰ Majidi Rashad Abdel-Ghani, *El-Alakat Elibia Elmisria 1945-1969* [Egyptian Libyan relations 1945-1969] (Cairo: Alhayya Al-Misria Lilkitab, 2007), 275.

framework of cultural assistance from the U.S. government. Initially, Khadduri worked in cooperation with the Libyan Minister of Education to nominate and assign several U.S. professors to fulfill university needs, but the two education administrators soon differed on the issue of Egyptian professors. While Khadduri advocated for two “first-rate professors from the United States” as well as applicants from Iraq and Jordan, the Minister of Education insisted on ten Egyptian professors whom he had invited to join the faculty when he had visited Egypt.⁹¹ Khadduri justified his position based on a combination of “high academic standing” as well as the desirability of having a professoriate drawn from a variety of countries, “not from one only.”⁹² Khadduri made his case to Libya’s King Idris, threatening to resign his position as Dean if a better outcome could not be secured. Similarly, U.S. embassy complaints led to long and fractious meetings with the Libyan Ministry of Education in Bayyadah (east of Benghazi 200 kilometers). The meetings resulted no serious change at the time, so Khadduri left the university to return to his position at the University of Wisconsin. Members of the U.S. embassy were disappointed by his decision, and subsequently they described him as arrogant and believed that he had not earnestly argued for a satisfactory solution to the situation in Libya.⁹³ One final, smaller way in which the U.S. sought to limit Egyptian influence in Libya was by strengthening the Benghazi radio station to counter the popularity of Egyptian radio, especially the Arab Voice. So, the United States did work

⁹¹ Memorandum to Ambassador Tappin from Khadduri (Libyan University), June 1957, Despatch no. 10, Central Files 873.432/8-757, USNA.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Department of State, “Observations of Libyan University’s American Dean on the Eve of his Departure,” by first secretary in U.S embassy in Benghazi, Libya Edwin L. Smith, August 7, 1957, Despatch no. 10, Central Files 873.432/8-757, USNA.

on all levels to limit or eliminate Egyptian influence internally and externally, internationally and locally.

In light of U.S. efforts to reduce Egyptian influence in Libya, the United States also attempted to diplomatically separate Libya from Egypt by encouraging Libya to strengthen its relations with pro-Western countries in the Middle East and to minimize its involvement in divisive Middle East problems and disputes.⁹⁴ These efforts resulted in a Libyan-Saudi Arabian rapprochement that culminated with King Saud's visit to Libya on his way back from the United States in 1957; both countries had accepted the Eisenhower Doctrine.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the United States went on to form a broader North African political association that included Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria (after it gained independence); it was meant to develop and diffuse a native ideology opposed to Nasserism. Its first leader was Tunisian President Habib Ben Ali Bourguiba, who held very different views than Nasser and who openly feuded with the Egyptian leader. For this reason, the United States encouraged Libya "to draw more closely politically, culturally and economically to Tunisia and Morocco."⁹⁶ American policymakers hoped that this would eventually wean Libya away from the Arab League's influence as well as help insulate the rest of North Africa from Egyptian intrigue.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ National Security Council Report 6004/1, 15 March 1960, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 13: 748-49; National Security Council Report 5716/1, 29 June 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 493-94.

⁹⁵ Abdel-Ghani, *El-Alakat Elibia Elmisria*, 272.

⁹⁶ National Security Council Report 5716/1, 29 June 1957, *FRUS, 1955-57*, 18: 494-95.

⁹⁷ Lorna Hahn, *North Africa: Nationalism to Nationhood* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1960), 240-41.

Strategically, the United States was particularly concerned about North Africa, which had a major bearing on U.S. security interests, as it formed the southern flank of Western Europe. America also had key air and naval bases and communications facilities in the region that remained important factors in U.S. military strength for years to come. The Algerian rebellion in particular had been “a divisive factor in the non-communist world” that also weakened NATO’s military strength in Europe and “decreased Western political influence in Africa and Asia.”⁹⁸ Therefore, the United States hoped that its North African confederation idea, led by Bourguiba, could serve as a bulwark and alternative to Nasser’s Pan-Arab ambitions. In the Libyan context, the hope was that such a confederation would effectively isolate Libya from Cairo, stabilize the country, and put Wheelus Field on safer political ground along with other U.S. bases in Morocco and Tunisia.⁹⁹

With support from the United States, a treaty of fraternity and good-neighborliness was signed in Tunisia in January 1957 between Libya and Tunisia by Bourguiba and Bin Halim. After a preamble stressing their solidarity and obligations for mutual defense, the treaty expressed both countries’ desire to promote concrete measures that would bring the two nations into closer harmony by ending customs barriers and restrictions on tourists, simplifying laws and tax regulations, building new means of cross-border transportation and communication, and providing mutual assistance in such matters as teaching, sanitation, and technology. Shortly thereafter, mixed commissions

⁹⁸ National Security Council Report 5911/1, 4 November 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960, 13: 615.

⁹⁹ Lorna Hahn, “Last Chance in North Africa,” *Foreign Affairs* 36, no. 2 (June 1958): 302-03.

were established to effect these provisions, and soon Tunisian professors, technicians, and engineers began to replace their Egyptian counterparts in Libya.¹⁰⁰ At the ceremony where the treaty was signed, Bourguiba said,

We have the conviction that in the Arab countries of North Africa, there exists a Mahgrebian solidarity imposed by economic, historical, and geographic imperatives . . . our efforts have led us to harden that solidarity not in order to direct it against any other power, but in order to make of it an instrument of cooperation with the rest, particularly with the Western world of which we form a part.¹⁰¹

Such words surely fit with U.S. aspirations in North Africa as well as Bourguiba's own ambitions. However, the treaty was a bilateral, not multilateral, treaty, and there was no specific clause dealing with the political dimensions of closer relations.

Discovery of oil

The discovery of oil in Libya had a significant impact on Libyan-American relations. The first discovery in 1957, followed by the determination in 1959 of the scope of the oil deposits, led to efforts by both sides to recalibrate relations toward each other according to their interests. For Libyan foreign policy, the discovery of oil was a beneficial new factor with potential to have a positive impact on the country's economic development, reduce its dependence on foreign aid, and thereby enhance its independence and liberty among the world community. However, such new wealth also

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 308-09; idem, *North Africa*, 240.

¹⁰¹ As quoted in Hahn, "Last Chance in North Africa," 309.

made the country vulnerable to new and additional internal and external pressures.¹⁰² As such, the year 1959 was a watershed year in Libya's post-independence history.

The promise of oil had existed for some time in Libya. In 1914, Italian companies had discovered natural gas in a well near Tripoli, which encouraged some preliminary geological surveys that were largely forestalled by the outbreak of war. In 1947, under the Anglo-French administration of the country, Standard Oil of New Jersey sought to surreptitiously explore Libyan lands as part of its Egyptian work. However the Anglo-French administration in Cyrenaica quickly put an end to these efforts, leaving the question to whatever government would emerge from U.N. decisions.¹⁰³ When Libya eventually gained its independence, it lacked the financial resources to conduct preliminary geological surveys, despite its eagerness to find alternative sources to support the country economically. To this end, the Libyan government enacted its General Minerals Law No. 9 in September 1953, which granted permission to nine companies to conduct these geological surveys.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² John I. Clarke. "Oil in Libya: Some Implications," *Economic Geography* 39, no. 1 (January 1963): 59.

¹⁰³ Elkese, *Al Seeyasah Alamricia Tejah Libya 1949-1957*, 215.

¹⁰⁴ Rawle Farley, *Planning for Development in Libya: The Exceptional Economy in the Developing World* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 115. The nine companies were the Mobil Company (through its affiliate Mobil Oil Canada, Libya Branch); the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (through its affiliate Esso Standard, Libya); the Royal Dutch Shell Group (through its affiliate Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company); Compagnie Française des Pétroles (through its affiliate Compagnie des Pétroles Total, Libya); British Petroleum (through its affiliate D'Arcy Exploration Company, Africa, Ltd.); American Overseas (acting as California Asiatic Oil Company and Texaco Overseas Petroleum Company); the Oasis Oil Company (the Libyan affiliate of an Ohio company); and Nelson Bunker Hunt (an American independent operator).

Following these surveys, the Libyan Parliament enacted in 1955 the Libyan Petroleum Law that established the framework for intensive explorations. Oil company experts advised the Libyan government on the law, which meant that it included several elements that were particularly favorable to their commercial interests. For example, the law stipulated that the government would receive a 12.5% royalty on all oil produced, and profits were to be split on a 50-50 basis, based on the prices realized, not the prices posted.¹⁰⁵ Although these terms were generous to the oil companies, they also served the purpose of attracting additional companies, stimulating both competition and exploration. Ultimately, the law and its profit-sharing arrangements were revisited in 1961.¹⁰⁶

To manage this competition, in May 1955 the Libyan government established its Petroleum Commission to manage the oil concessions. The commission consisted of a president and three members (one representative for each province) who, in the first three years, granted 71 concessions to fourteen foreign companies. In other words, by the middle of 1961 the whole of northern half of the country was under concession—some 387,780 square miles of land and 11,150 square miles of sea.¹⁰⁷ Twelve American companies gained more than 50 concessions, and together with the British companies

¹⁰⁵ Clarke, "Oil in Libya," 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 42-43; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 77-79.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Taher El-Hadi El-Jahmee, *Ather El-Batrol Ala Adakhel El-Qumi Fee Libia* [The impact of oil on the national income in Libya] (Benghazi, Libya: El-Kharaz Library, 1969), 38-39; Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 78; Clarke, "Oil in Libya," 43.

they controlled more than 90% of the concessions,¹⁰⁸ some of which were gained through bribery.¹⁰⁹

The first significant oil discovery in Libya came in December 1957 at Atshan field in Fezzan near the Algerian border by Esso, which initially underestimated the wealth of the find. In early 1958, it estimated that only 500 barrels per day would come from this well, but by September 1959, it estimated commercial exports starting at a rate of 25,000 barrels per day by January 1962 and 100,000 barrels per day by the end of 1964. Such exports would meet the needs of the expanding European market and provide significant funds to the Libyan government. Esso estimated net oil revenue to Tripoli in 1962 of \$3.4 million, rising to \$8.0 million by 1964. Considering that the Libyan national budget at the time was \$18 million per year, this was indeed a significant infusion of cash for the previously struggling country.¹¹⁰

By early 1962, 164 Libyan wells were producing with the potential of 250,663 barrels a day, which constituted 3.6% of the total world crude oil production of 1961 and one-seventh of total Middle East production in that year. The process of getting this oil to market was started with Esso Standard's 1961 construction of an initial 110 miles of pipeline to a new Mediterranean terminal at Marsa El Berga.¹¹¹ In the light of these

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁹ 96th meeting of Council on Foreign Economic Policy, U.S. Council on Foreign Economic Policy, Office of the Chairman records 1954-61, Randall series, Trip subseries, box 4, folder: India trip December 1959, DDEPL.

¹¹⁰ OCB special report to NSC, "Implications of Petroleum Developments on U.S. Operations in Libya," 23 September 1959, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-61, NSC series, Policy Papers subseries, box 21, folder: NSC 5716/1-U.S. policy toward Libya (1), DDEPL.

¹¹¹ Clarke, "Oil in Libya," 44-46.

developments, the Libyan economy took off rapidly. Per capita gross national product rose by a factor of more than twenty-five, from around \$40 million in the early 1950s to over \$1 billion in 1967. Libya eventually become the most dramatic example of economic growth during the 1960s and in the twentieth century.¹¹²

This dramatic turn of events spurred reconsideration of U.S. policy toward Libya on a variety of levels starting in September 1959.¹¹³ The United States recognized that Libya's tolerance of Wheelus Base was primarily borne of economic necessity and therefore was likely to change as Libya became economically self-sufficient. No longer would the North African country be dependent on Anglo-American aid to meet its annual trade-balance deficit. Indeed, by the mid-1960s, the United States estimated that oil revenues would exceed the levels of economic aid that Washington and London combined were providing. The OCB concluded that "This will undoubtedly affect Libyan attitudes toward our military installations."¹¹⁴ The outlook on Libya provided in the December 1959 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) clearly stated that a new approach was needed given the new circumstances prevailing in the country; it also seemed to call for an assessment on whether Wheelus was still essential, as it might be difficult to hold onto in the new Libya.¹¹⁵

¹¹² St. John, *Libya and the United States*, 83.

¹¹³ OCB special report to NSC, "Implications of Petroleum Developments on U.S. Operations in Libya," 23 September 1959.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Planning Board meeting, 30 October 1959, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-61, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, box 12, folder: U.S policy toward Libya, DDEPL.

Accordingly, the National Security Council (NSC) on March 10, 1960, adopted a new U.S. policy toward Libya in its statement 6004/1. The new report described the political situation in Libya, including several concerning issues. The prime concern was the aging of King Idris, who was the main source of political stability in Libya; his death would likely cause political instability that could lead to a chaotic free-for-all, especially given the pan-Arab nationalism prevailing among younger urban elements. In such circumstances, long-standing Egyptian designs on Libya could come to fruition. Additionally, many social and economic problems were rising with the impact of oil production in the country that needed to be addressed. The NSC also worried about the effect of the new wealth on the country's internal security and unity. Industrial development tied to the oil industry promised to promote urbanization, which could further destabilize the country by creating fertile ground for political agitation among youth and labor-union elements.¹¹⁶ Based on this analysis, NSC 6004/1 set two objectives for the future of Libyan-American relations: continued availability and use of U.S. military facilities in Libya and supporting the on-going stability of the central government. If achieved, these goals would ensure continued Western access to Libyan oil reserves, minimize communist and other anti-Western influences (especially Egyptian influence), and create general cooperation between the Libyan government, the United States, and its allies.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Statement of NSC 6004/1 on U.S. policy toward Libya, 15 March 1960, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-61, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, box 12, folder: U.S policy toward Libya, DDEPL.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Although NSC 6004/1 was to sketch a new U.S. policy toward Libya, there was little new in the policy that had not already been in place since the early 1950s. Familiar Cold War rhythms predominated despite the shock of the oil discovery. Indeed, the State Department was still focused on providing economic assistance to Libya as late as February 1960, providing stability and continuity until increasing oil revenues made such aid irrelevant. This was seen as the best way of retaining “our rights in Libya.”¹¹⁸ Increasingly the Treasury Department started to advocate an end to aid. However, State won this bureaucratic battle, as U.S. policymakers increasingly faced the near-term mortality of King Idris. In these circumstances, it seemed best to cultivate and support political elements in the country who could provide stability after the King’s death. A stable Libya was clearly in U.S. interests, and only such a government would be willing and able to permit Western access to Libyan oil resources and strategic base locations.¹¹⁹ The discovery of Libyan oil added a new element into the foreign policy of both the United States and Libya. Yet the U.S. interests in the country remained largely the same—maintaining its military presence in Libya as the best way to counter the Soviet Union and its allies in the region.

¹¹⁸ Memorandum for NSC on U.S. policy toward Libya, 12 February 1960, WHO, Office of the Special Assistant for NSC Affairs records 1952-61, NSC series, Briefing Notes subseries, box 12, folder: U.S policy toward Libya, DDEPL.

¹¹⁹ Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, 4 March 1960, WHO, NSC Staff papers 1948-61, box 45, Disaster file series: Libya (3), DDEPL.

CHAPTER V:

LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, PUBLIC HISTORY, AND ORAL HISTORY

Through the previous five chapters, I have worked to reveal the historical realities of Libyan-American relations in a more realistic and objective manner from archival sources in the United States as well as key secondary sources in both English and Arabic. The ultimate audience of this study is the Libyan people. My goal is to correct the fallacies about the monarchical period created by Gaddafi and Nasserist propaganda. By denying its achievements, they have distorted this key period in Libyan national history, which otherwise could provide important historical lessons as Libya again seeks to define itself to its people and on the international stage. However, this distortion will be a very difficult task to clear and correct, since it is both widespread and deeply believed. Nonetheless, public history, especially oral history, offers a way forward, allowing the public historian to gain new insights into this aspect of Libyan history and providing opportunities to correct the historical record and the views of the broader public.

As I discussed in the introduction, there is very little in terms of professional historical study, especially from the Libyan perspective, on Libya and Libyan-American relations during the monarchical period. When I started my studies at Middle Tennessee State University, I had hoped to be able to fill in this gap, in part by using oral histories to gather historical data from the Libyan perspective on this period, since little of the official historical documentation in Libya survived the Gaddafi era. As a result, I

conducted some interviews in the United States, and I consulted earlier oral histories that were part of the Libyan National Archives during my Public History Professional Residency. This occurred during the small window of opportunity (during the summer of 2013) between the fall of the Gaddafi regime and the failure of the Libyan state. During that period, I imagined being able to return to Libya and to my alma mater Gar Yuns University to use oral history methodology to reclaim this lost period of Libyan history and to redevelop Gar Yuns's role in using oral history to gather and record the history of Libya's people. It was exciting to imagine the possibilities of using oral history as a means of democratizing the country and telling its history more fully. However, those dreams have largely slipped away in recent years, as Libya's leaders have been unable to fashion a functioning state that can protect itself and its people from the dangers of the Islamic state and human traffickers. Nonetheless, in this chapter, I will lay out the ways in which I have used oral history to illuminate key aspects of Libyan-American relations during the monarchical period and Libyan oral history.

The history of oral history

Over the past seven decades, oral history emerged first in the United States as a way of creating and understanding historical sources and then emerged as its own professional discipline and as an integral part of public history. By recording spoken accounts and memories, oral history—like published memoirs—can provide key insights into recent events and has become a major resource for contemporary history. Allan Nevins, an American journalist and historian, is considered a father of modern oral

history, who along with Louis Star established the Oral History Office in the History Department at Columbia University in 1948 to tape-record and preserve interviews. During the 1950s, similar centers emerged in Texas, Brooklyn, and Los Angeles. Oral history took a great leap with the establishment of the Oral History Association in 1967 and the publication of its journal, *The Oral History Review*, in 1973.¹

In Europe, Britain pioneered in utilizing oral history as a method of gathering qualitative data in the social sciences, especially sociology. Paul Thompson, a British sociologist, argued, especially in his book *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* that the task of oral history was to democratize history by bringing the stories of common people back into the field. His work (and that of those who followed his lead) led to the creation of the first industrial museum and new interpretations of the working class based on oral histories; additionally, another journal and society to promote oral history emerged. As a result, by the early 1970s, oral history had taken its proper place as an important historical resource. The field has continued to grow and prosper. Recently, Thompson paired with Hugo Slim in 1993 to argue that a new direction and mission for oral history is to be an instrument for changing and challenging the interpretations of traditional history.²

¹ Willa K. Baum, "Oral History in the United States," *Oral History* 1, no. 3 (1972): 17-25; Fathi Leesir, *Tarekh El-Zamen El-Rahen: In-dema Yatruk El-Muarekh Bab El-Hather* [History of current time: When an historian knocks on the door of the present] (Tunis, Tunisia: Mohamed Ali's Library, 2012), 123.

² Leesir, *Tarekh El-Zamen El-Rahen*, 125; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2-24; Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development* (London: Panos Publications, 1993).

The rise of oral history as a professional field had a direct impact on Libya, which developed experience in oral history and oral history archives at about the same time. The first seeds were in Gar Yuns University, which specialized in conducting oral histories with a focus on the period of Italian colonization and the Libyan struggle against that colonization (1911-1943) as well as the period when Britain and France were administering Libya (1943-1951). In different projects by students and faculty members in the university's Department of History, they conducted dozens of interviews with people from all walks of life.³

Those interviews were later deposited in the Oral Division of the Center for Libyan Archives and Historical Studies (CLAS), which was established in 1978 in Tripoli. The Oral Division then fell under the academic supervision of the History Department of Tripoli University. CLAS has particularly focused over the past four decades on gathering the oral histories of veterans in the struggle against Italy. Starting on January 23, 1978, the Oral Division received three months of training under Jan Vansina (who was born in Belgium but taught at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and was an innovator in the field of oral history by fusing anthropological and historical methods to tell the history of Central Africa). This, in turn, led the Oral Division to launch a national oral history project staffed in part by a group of undergraduate students from the History Department in Tripoli University who worked as oral history interviewers. The students therefore had solid training in the theoretical and practical

³ Ismail Kharzaa, interview by staff of Center for Libyan Archives and Historical Studies (hereafter CLAS) on September 1, 2013, <http://libsc.org.ly/mrkaz/index.php/2015-10-29-06-55-55/2015-10-29-06-58-15/2015-10-29-06-59-53> (accessed February 1, 2017).

aspects of oral history interviewing. Then, the Oral Division divided Libya into seventeen research areas (see Figure 7) based on the administrative divisions of the state and the local cultures and languages; this division was meant to facilitate work in each of the areas. Over four decades, the resulting interviews filled more than eight thousand tapes, preserving the histories of Libyans from all walks of life who witnessed these two periods as well as other aspects of contemporary history.⁴ Of these, 5,164 tapes have



Figure 7: Seventeen Oral History Research Areas Based on Language and Culture⁵

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Abdel-Rahman Elbureki, *Mawsuat Rewayat El-Jihad* [Encyclopedia of Jihad narrations] (Tripoli, Libya: CLAS, 2008), 10.

been transcribed and archived so far, while 3,356 tapes still remain to be processed. The Oral Division is also working on an encyclopedia of oral history based on the archived interviews. I was fortunate enough to have the great opportunity to work with these recordings and to assess them as part of my Public History Professional Residency, which I will discuss later. Like earlier oral history projects, the CLAS Oral Division sought to fill gaps in the historical record and to democratize the sources upon which future histories would be written. Unsurprisingly, the official Italian records from the colonial period did not include the stories of Libyan veterans of the anticolonial conflict; additionally, a majority of these veterans were literate and therefore unable to leave written accounts of their experiences. They could not document their struggle except through oral tradition. Additionally, the oral history project helped salvage Libya's cultural heritage by gathering ethnological memories. Additionally, this was a conscious effort by Libyans to reconstruct a more inclusive history "from the bottom up" by valuing and preserving the spoken recollections of events by people who had been neglected in the written records, including both the lower socio-economic classes as well as cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities.⁶ The work of the CLAS Oral Division has been published in a variety of formats. Many of the veterans' accounts of the decolonization effort have been collected into the many volumes of *The Encyclopedia of Jihad Narrations*, and all of the oral histories are part of CLAS' *Oral Narrative Index*, which helps researchers find what they need easily and quickly.⁷

⁶ Lessir, *Tarekh El-Zamen El-Rahen*, 124-26.

⁷ See, for example, Elbureki, *Mawsuat Rewayat El-Jehad*.

Another, complementary set of oral histories came out of Gar Yuns University's early work. Majid Khadduri conducted a number of interviews while he served as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Libyan University (later renamed Gar Yuns) in the mid-1950s. He specifically focused on those who had played a key role in the Libyan monarchical period that followed the Anglo-French administrative period immediately after World War II. Khadduri interviewed a majority of Libya's former political leaders, including King Idris, the governors of Cyrenaica,⁸ and the governors of Tripoli.⁹ Also interviewed were the royal palace staff,¹⁰ former government ministers,¹¹ former cabinet members,¹² the Chief of the Executive Council of Tripoli,¹³ a member of the Libyan parliament,¹⁴ a member of the Libyan Foreign Office,¹⁵ and three former Libyan Prime Ministers.¹⁶ Khadduri also conducted interviews with foreign politicians who had worked in Libya after its independence, including W. G. C. Graham, who served as British ambassador to Libya; Sir Duncan Cumming, former British Chief Political Officer in Cyrenaica; British Professor J. N. D. Anderson, former liaison officer with the Sanusi force in Cairo; Adrian Pelt, former United Nations Commissioner in Libya; Sir Alec Kirkbride, first British ambassador to Libya; Abd al-Rahman Azzam, former Secretary-

⁸ Mohmud Muntasir, Muhmmmed Saqizli, Mustafa Bin Halim, Abd al-Majid Kubar, Husayn Maziq, and Mahmud Abu Hidma.

⁹ Fadil Bin Zikri and Abd al-Salam al-Busiri.

¹⁰ Ali al-Sahili and Busiri al-Shalhi.

¹¹ Including Ali al-Unayzi, Ali Jirbi, Sulayman Jirbi, Abd al-Rahman Qalhud, Khalil Qallal, Mansur Qadara, Ali Juuda, and Mustafa Sarraj.

¹² Abd al-Aziz al-Zaqallai and Abd al-Mawla Lanqi.

¹³ Ali al-Dib.

¹⁴ Bashir al-Mugharibi.

¹⁵ Mustafa Baaiu.

¹⁶ Mahmud Makhluf, Mahdi al-Mutardi, and Mahmmmed Ben Uthman.

General of the Arab League; and E. A. V. De Candole, former British Governor of Cyrenaica.¹⁷ Khadduri used these oral histories as the foundation for his study of Libyan-American relations, *Modern Libya*. It still stands as the key work to cover political developments in Libya during the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately, Khadduri did not mention where he deposited these interviews, which would be a great oral history collection that others could use in writing the history of Libya in the 1950s and 1960s.

Oral history project

Generally, oral history exists in four forms: the original oral interview; the recorded version of the interview, also called the “archived interview”; the written transcript; and finally the interpretation of the interview material.¹⁸ The oral history that undergirds this project is divided into two main parts. The first part was to conduct oral history interviews with people who lived in the monarchical period in order to both fill in gaps and to democratize the history by enlisting all voices that might shed additional light on the existing history of Libyan-American relations. The second part is based on the archived interviews at CLAS, where I did my Public History Professional Residency and listened to all of the interviews there related to Libyan-American relations, keeping in mind that these were conducted during the Gaddafi regime.

With respect to the first part, I conducted thirteen interviews with individuals who were involved in that period and who represented many walks of life in Libyan and American societies. I was able to interview former prime deputies, U.S. veterans who

¹⁷ Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, vi-vii.

¹⁸ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9.

either worked or lived at Wheelus Field, members of political parties, and students. To conduct oral histories successfully in Libya, one should be aware of Libyan sociology, history, and anthropology. Based on my experience with Libyan oral history, it is complicated and suffers from several complex problems, which influence its structure and credibility, especially after 2011, with its attendant effects. Before analyzing those challenges, I would like to start by discussing interviews that I conducted.

Starting with the United States, I did two interviews with U.S. veterans (Eugene G. Clayton and Robert T. Sullivan) who had been stationed at Wheelus Field, and the third one was with a daughter (Victoria Giraud) whose father had been stationed there. Through their interviews I realized that U.S. citizens who lived in Tripoli as soldiers add color but no significant substance to the history of Libyan-American relations for several main reasons. First and foremost, they were young, most of them in their early twenties, and not particularly interested in politics. In their oral histories, they state that they did not recognize what was behind the politics they did see, and some did not even know why they were stationed in Libya. “They were there for their job” Clayton said. Some did not even know where they were going. When they got there, the language barrier often prevented the Americans from communicating with the Libyans they met on the streets. Therefore, the information the soldiers and their families received was general, and often limited to what the U.S. personnel at Wheelus Field provided them, such as pamphlets, newspapers, and guidebooks for new, incoming soldiers.¹⁹ Subsequently, their memories in Libya shed very limited light on the Libyan-American relations of the

¹⁹ For example, Department of Air Force, *Dependents Information on Libya* (Washington, DC, 1957).

time unless they were in high ranking positions in the base, such as commanders of the base or others in senior-ranking positions. Nonetheless, I have included summaries of the interviews I conducted below in order to preserve and disseminate the content of those oral histories.

Mr. Clayton began the interview by talking about his job in the 34th Radio Squadron Mobile in the U.S. Air Force Security Service at Wheelus Air Force Base in Tripoli, Libya, from 1950 to 1953. He continued by talking about the Italian family he lived with during his time in Libya and how he met and became friends with some “great” British soldiers during his time in country. In his discussion, he described how it was mainly the English soldiers who had negative interactions with the Libyan people--not the Americans. He went on to discuss the history of American involvement in Libya and how Libya became a protectorate of Great Britain after World War II. He also examines the Libyan Declaration of Independence and the rise to power of King Idris in 1951. The middle part of the interview focused on his everyday life while in the country, including places he ate and shopped and people he interacted with. Mr. Clayton also discussed his travels to places including Rome, Morocco, and even ancient Roman sites in Libya like Sabratha. The middle part of the interview also focuses on Mr. Clayton’s jobs in the Air Force while in Libya. He mentions how he was placed on guard duty several times, and he also explains that most of the flights in and out of Wheelus were for supplies. In some of the final topics of the interview, Mr. Clayton talks about his Italian girlfriend, the barter system he engaged in with the locals as well as his current connection to other American veterans and civilians who lived in Libya during that time.

He concludes the interview with a brief discussion of his time in the Air Force after he left Libya, which included stations in Washington D.C., Michigan, and New York, as well as his personal thoughts on the state of the Middle East today.²⁰

Mr. Robert T. Sullivan started his interview by discussing his enlistment into the U.S. Air Force in 1966 and went on to discuss his deployment to Wheelus Airbase in Tripoli, Libya, where he worked on F-100 fighter airplanes. He continued by discussing his commander, Daniel “Chappie” James, who became a famous pilot from the Vietnam War, a topic that continued to come up throughout the interview. Mr. Sullivan also talked about how his interactions with people of other nationalities were limited outside the base and how the start of the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 changed the atmosphere of the base. During the war, he recounted hearing about violent interactions between some American and Libyan people off the base as well as hearing gunfire and bombings in the proximity of protesters in the downtown area of the city. However, there was no violence on the base, and he never experienced any violence himself. Later in the interview, he discussed how many civilians came on base for protection during the war and were able to stay in military housing. In the middle part of the interview, Mr. Sullivan discussed his time on the base and how “very boring” it was for him since there was very little to do. However, he did have fun visiting places like the Georgian Populi district and an island near Tripoli where he and his friends went snorkeling. Mr. Sullivan also discussed one of his “most striking experiences” when he and a friend went to buy a motorcycle.

²⁰ Eugene G. Clayton, interview by the author, Red Carpet Hotel: Endicott, NY, March 27, 2014, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format. In author’s possession.

He remembered feeling like he “didn’t belong there,” and this changed his viewpoint on how people from other countries must feel when they come to America. Mr. Sullivan concluded the interview talking about the Arab-Israeli relationship as it currently stands; his thoughts on the Arab-Israeli War of 1967; and with the differences he saw between the United States and Libya.²¹

Ms. Giraud began her interview by discussing her time as a civilian in Tripoli, Libya, in the late 1950s. She was a teenager stationed with her family while her father worked for the Army Corps of Engineers. Since her father was not in the Air Force, they did not live on Wheelus Airbase with the other military families; they lived in a small section of Tripoli called Garden City near the King’s palace. Most of the foreign embassies were in this area, and she encountered people of many nationalities there, including the Egyptian ambassador. She went on to talk about her move there, and the instructions she was given in an effort to ease her into the new culture. She continued the discussion by talking about her schooling while there as well as her classmates. She also recounts school trips to Leptis Magna, a prominent historical site from the period of the Roman Empire that is 62 miles from Tripoli, as well as Roman Sabratha, another historical city. She also commented on her interactions with Libyans, which did not include many interactions with women. Towards the middle of the interview, she recounted her first camel ride, which took place on the beach during a Fourth of July celebration. She continued talking about her first impressions of Libya, including the

²¹ Robert T. Sullivan, interview by the author, public library of Tuscaloosa, AL, April 10, 2014, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format.in author’s possession.

smells and the food; she found Libya “exotic.” She even recounted her first experience at a Libyan rodeo where many sheiks came and performed with camels. The most memorable event that took place while she was there was the Suez Crisis of 1956. Although she remembers bombings and some demonstrations, she says that it did not disrupt her life very much as a U.S. citizen. She concluded the interview with a discussion about women in the Middle East today and the troubles they face along with short anecdotes about Libyan music, animals, and how the culture of Libya “broadened [her] viewpoint.”²² In conclusion, these oral histories of citizen are valuable for describing the operations of Wheelus as a military base, for understanding the activities of base personnel related to their jobs, and for describing public events at the base and Americans’ relations on base as soldiers; oral histories with high-ranking commanders on the base might or might not add a further dimension to the present study.

I also conducted three interviews in the United States with Libyan immigrants who were opponents of the regime of Muammar Gadhafi. Their interviews are invaluable to better understanding Libyan-American relations in general, and they specifically provide insights into how Egyptian influences played into U.S. policy toward Libya. Despite the differences in their backgrounds, thinking, and general inclinations (one narrator came to the United States as a student in 1973, and the other two interviewees came to the United States as political opponents), all of them agreed that Nasserist propaganda influenced Libyans at all levels of society and that this influence

²² Victoria Giraud, interview by the author and Amy Sayward over the phone, College of Graduate Studies: Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, June 4, 2014, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author’s possession.

was later reflected in government policy toward the United States in the 1950s. Furthermore, these oral histories provide insights into that influence in ways that are not in the general written historical record. As a result, these interviews give historians new avenues for imagining this trilateral relationship that are very different from what is currently in the historiography. In this set of interviews, the oral testimony must be examined in light of the distance of the interviewee from the events described, the intervening changes in politics that can influence the memory of past events, and the age of the participants.

Mohamed Banon, who currently lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, came to the United States in 1973 to study engineering at the Ohio State University. In the early 1990s, as part of Gaddafi's actions against his political opponents, Banon's uncle was tortured to death in jail. Therefore, Banon professed his opposition to Gadhafi regime, but this was a significant change of mind for Banon. In his oral history, he explained his position against the monarchical regime when he was a student in Libya. Banon's opposition flowed directly from the Nasserist influences in Libyan media and newspapers, which stressed the ideal of Arab unity and the evils of foreign domination, embodied in Western military bases such as Wheelus Field. In fact, Banon participated in some demonstrations against foreign bases in 1967 (see Figure 8).²³ Not only the ideas, but the persona of Nasser, appealed to many in Banon's generation, who saw the Egyptian leader stand up to Western imperialism during the Suez Crisis and in his nation's wars against Israel.

²³ He provided me with a copy of the pledge signed by his father that stated he would not participate in such protests again. The pledge was issued by his elementary school on February 2, 1967.

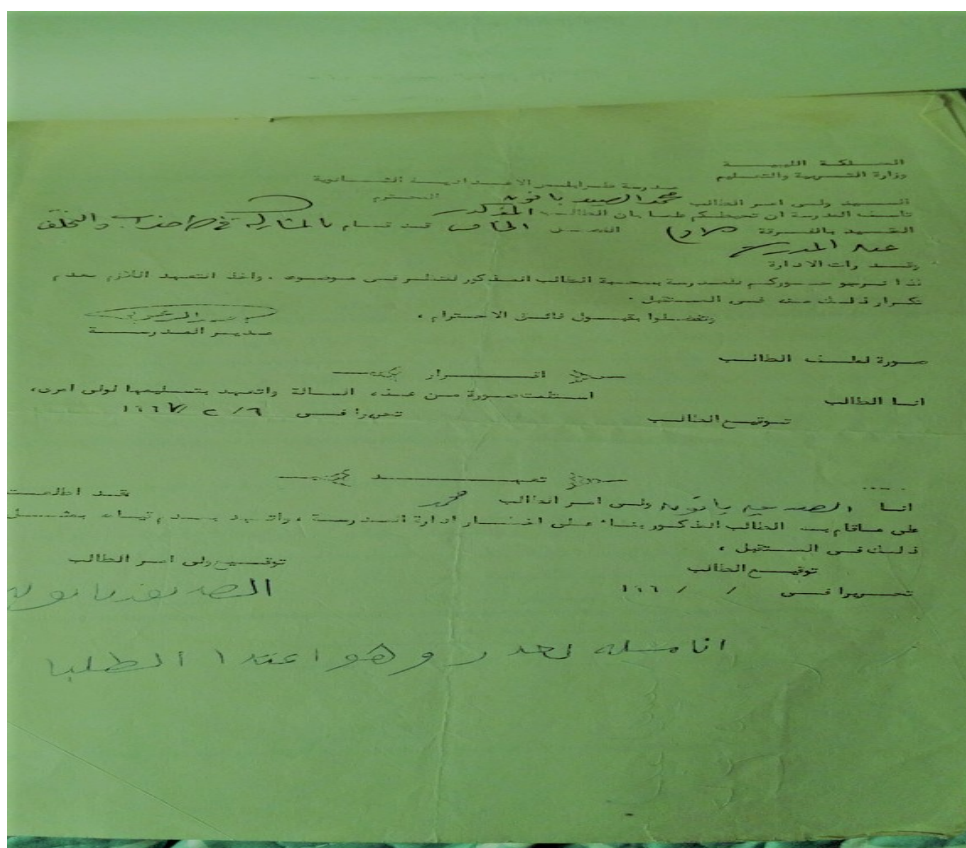


Figure 8: Bannon's Pledge Issued by His School on February 2, 1967

Banon also described how, when Nasser visited Libya in December 1969 to congratulate Gaddafi on his successful coup to take over the Libyan government (which resembled Nasser's own ascent to power) that Banon and his generation considered and saw Nasser as a new prophet or even an angel who had come to speak for their generation. With the benefit of age and wisdom, Banon now believes Nasserism misled him and many of his

generation, turning them against the monarchy unjustly and facilitating the rise of a brutal dictator.²⁴

Unlike the oral histories that I conducted with Americans who served at Wheelus, this interview was more frank and had more depth due to the trust that existed between the interviewee and interviewer. In addition to sharing common gender, ethnic, cultural, national, class, and religious characteristics that allowed for a greater affinity, this oral history was also based in friendship. Additionally, the two parties involved in the creation of this oral history shared a common goal of recovering the history of the monarchical period. Indeed, I told Banon at the beginning that this endeavor that it was an effort to uncover the truth of the period and to share it with both academic and public audiences. He responded enthusiastically, and the interview was conducted in an atmosphere of trust, which is key to a successful oral history that comes as close to the truth as possible. Alessandro Portelli, a professor of Anglo-American literature at the University of Rome La Sapienza, has several seminal publications in oral history. Portelli describes the relation between interviewer and interviewee engaged in creating an oral history source as “deep exchange” to elicit a narrative response that occurs on a number of levels. It is not only questions and answers but includes give and take and results in a collaborative, and often cooperative, product that involves factual information and the sharing of autobiographical reminiscence as well as emotion and reflection.²⁵ In

²⁴ Mohamed Banon, interview by the author, December 20, 2014, 707 Martin Luther King Drive: Cincinnati, OH, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format in author's possession.

²⁵ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 10-11.

addition to that, the oral history followed an informal format (open interview), which helped to gain a confidence of the interviewee.²⁶

My second interview was also with someone with whom I shared a common background and resulted in a valuable oral testimony, but Mahmud Duwake and I were not friends before the interview. Nonetheless, the information that he provided in his oral history bore many similarities to the first interview. Duwake, who now lives in Huntsville, Alabama, came to the United States as a political refugee in the early 1980s after a disagreement with Gaddafi that followed Duwake being appointed as Minister of Municipalities without his knowledge or approval. However, like Banon, Duwake had been opposed to the monarchy and had supported Gaddafi due to the influence of Nasserist propaganda, especially through Arab Radio. In fact, Duwake saw his dislike for the monarchy as evidence of his patriotism, and Nasser's support for pan-Arabism and for the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel only increased this feeling. Also like Banon, Duwake came to see the error of his ways and even went to Egypt to visit King Idris in person and apologize for what he had thought about the King. Duwake explained that Egyptian influence had reached all the people—even the illiterate and ignorant. He said it was rare to find someone in Libya who did not support Nasser, and these few people were considered as eccentric. Duwake took his opposition to the Gadhafi regime further, joining Jabhat Inqad Libya [the salvation of Libya front] after he came to the

²⁶ Brian Harrison, "Oral History and Recent Political History," *Oral History* 1, no. 3 (1972): 44.

United States.²⁷ The fact that these two men—who do not know one another—had such similar stories of disillusionment with the Nasserite vision and the Gaddafi regime after 1969 points to the likelihood of a broader trend and makes both more credible. The fact that both are elder interviewees also lends them more credibility, and Duwake enriches the discussion of Banon on the influence of Egyptian propaganda in a richly emotional manner that cannot be found in written sources.²⁸

My third interviewee in the United States was Mohamed Al Magariaf. While he also came to the United States as an opponent of Gaddafi in the early 1980s, he has a different perspective as a historian and the author of several works on the history of Libya.²⁹ But he also—like Banon and Duwake—expressed the belief that Nasserism played a significant role in undermining the monarchy in Libya. I asked him about restrictions that might have affected historical research and writing about the 1950s and 1960s. He replied that while there was no law against studying this period, Gaddafi had indeed tried to distort and obliterate the history of the monarchical period in different ways that effected the public memory of the post-revolution generations. This effort included some works written by the government that attacked the monarchy sharply as well as other works written by a few Nasserist writers. This helped to deter the majority

²⁷ Mohamed Elhadi Duwake, interview by the author, October 23, 2014, Huntsville Islamic Center, AL, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's.

²⁸ Harrison, "Oral History and Recent Political History," 38.

²⁹ Al Magariaf, *Libya Bain Al-Madi Wa 'l-Hader: Safhat Min Al-Tarikh Al Siyasi* [Libya between past and present: pages from political history], 4 vols.; idem, *Inqilab Al-Qaddafi: Al-Himaya Al-Nasiriya* [The Qaddafi coup: the Nasserite protection]; idem, *Inqilab Bekyadat Mokhber* [A coup led by informant].

of academic historians from writing about this period, so it is now a rich field that deserves a new, credible history.³⁰ Especially after the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, there was a huge opportunity for oral historians to save the memories of this period, despite the fact that we had lost a huge number of people who could have been interviewed over the last four decades to inform present histories. However, that opportunity seems largely to have passed, along with hopes of creating a stable and democratic Libya.³¹

I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to do my professional residency year in Libya in the brief period following Gaddafi's overthrow and before the Libyan state failed. During my residency, I conducted nine interviews with Libyans who were involved in the monarchical period. The interviewees were as follows:

- Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, 1951;
- Ahmed Goulah, Military Intelligence Division, 1958-1969;
- Ali Al-Hussnien, the last Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1968-1969;
- Ameen Elbizanti, Secretary of the Committees of the Foreign Minister, 1961;
- Suleiman El-Hadad, graduate student in Cairo University, Egypt, 1955-1961;
- Mohamed Frankah, member of the Block Party, 1946-1951;
- Mukhtar Kanon, Major-General, founder of Sanusi Army, 1940;
- Rassim Alnayli, Special Secretary of the Crown Prince, 1956-1969; and
- Salah Aldeen Assouri, historian and scholar.

³⁰ See the first chapter's section on the historiography of that period.

³¹ Mohamed Al – Magariaf, interview by the author, October 2, 2014, Al-Magariaf's Home: Atlanta, GA, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's possession.

One of the things that makes these interviews particularly valuable is that oral historians, such as Donal Watt, generally consider interviews with those who worked closely with the leader of an organization (rather than the actual leader) more revealing.³² This perspective is seconded by Beatrice Webb, an English sociologist, economist, socialist, labor historian and social reformer, who commented,

It is . . . almost axiomatic with the experienced investigator . . . that the mind of the subordinate in any organization will yield richer deposits of fact than the mind of the principal. This is not merely because the subordinate is usually less on his guard, and less severely conventional in working . . . [the] foreman, managing clerk or minor official is in continuous and intimate contact with the day-to-day activities of the organization.³³

For the purposes of this dissertation, the interview with Al-Ashiq was the most important. He was involved in the first interim government (led by Mahmoud Muntasir) before the Libyan declaration of independence in March 1951. As a knowledgeable person about the status of Libyan-American relations at the time, he explained the reality in Libya at the time as well as U.S. interests, which helped to shape the nature of this bilateral relationship. He goes to say that Libya's situation economically and politically involved her with Britain and the United States, because there was practically nothing to build from at any level of the new, weak state. He says that the task of state-building was very difficult, more than you can imagine. He also pointed out the extreme difficulties of operating a new country without money; "we worked nine months without [a] budget."³⁴

³² As quoted in Harrison, "oral history," 40.

³³ Harrison, 40, Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 362.

³⁴ Abdel Kareem Al-Ashiq, interview by author, May 29, 2013, Al-Ashiq's Home: Tripoli, Libya, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format, in author's possession.

He also goes to explain Egypt and Iraq's positions when the King asked them to help. Then he clarifies the nature of Egyptian influence on the general public, which was the main cause complicating Libyan politics with the West. He believes that the end of the monarchy was because of American covert policy, especially after the discovery of oil. Moreover, he goes to say that the United States had a role in ending the monarchy through the revolution of 1969, especially following the demand from Libya's parliament and government that the United States evacuate by the mid-1960s. Although his interpretation (which supports the skeptical school) is very doubtful given the current lack of strong historical evidence, what gives his statement some level of credibility is his position in the Libyan Department of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, Al-Ashiq's information gives us insight from a position extremely close to the Prime Minister. A final determination on the value of this oral history awaits further evidence to corroborate or to refute this testimony.

With respect to the rest of interviewees, they present different stories about and tendencies in their lives in the 1950s and 1960s, but all of them shared something about the influence of Nasserist propaganda in Libya. Although each experienced this in a different manner depending on their circumstances, they all seemed to be against the government policy toward the West. Outside of these two observations, their oral histories were useful to the study of Libyan-American relations but not at that level of those people who helped formulate Libyan foreign policy. Only one, Al-Hussnien, mentions the problems of Wheelus, including plane accidents in areas around the base.

My knowledge of Libya and of oral history helped me in several ways in this project. I was able to understand and speak the local dialects very well, especially with elderly and diplomatic people. I am also knowledgeable about the factors separating Libyans based on the social history of Libya in the monarchical period and about the competition between the western and eastern sections of Libya, which played a big role in Libya's political history from that time until today. The awareness of these factors—which come from both public history and academic history—is very important to be successful as an oral historian. The particularity of the Libyan personality—including social, cultural, and religious aspects as well as traditional lifestyles—influences how best to produce an oral history in the right way. For example, tribe plays a crucial role in the history of Libya and has both advantages and disadvantages. One drawback is that the collective memory of the tribes in Libya is full of conflicts and “bloody memory” that can make oral history like a “barrel of gunpowder” that could explode with one word. Oral historians must beware of such memories, and political historians understand that while new generations try forgetting that history, there are also those who try to refresh those memories for revenge or for their own interests, like what happened after 2011 between the cities of Bin-Waleed and Musrata. When Musrata attacked Bin-Waleed, denizens of Musrata accused the leaders of Bin-Waleed of being against the Arab Spring. Musratians who entered Bin-Waleed hung two big pictures of Ramadan Sewehli, leader of Musrata during Italian colonization, and of Abdel-Nabee Bel-Khair, leader of Bin-Waleed in 1920s, reminding them of the fighting between the two cities in 1920 that

killed Ramadan in Bin-Waleed.³⁵ Such kinds of memory have never been documented and present big challenges for historians trying to understand Libyan political, diplomatic, and social history. In conclusion, oral history and public history within problematic memory is not an easy task, needing a lot of skills and knowledge to handle it. However, the difficulties of collecting these oral histories offers rich rewards for future historical research.

Assessment of Libyan CLAS experience

Although Libyan oral history projects have done an admirable job of capturing and preserving important segments of Libyan history—especially the period of national struggle against Italian colonization from 1911 until 1943, there are still areas in need of improvement for various reasons. During the six months I spent in the oral history division of the CLAS, I went through a number of oral history interviews that are archived there. Most of those archived interviews were conducted by CLAS staff, but some of them seem to have been completed by the History Department staff in Gar Yuns University in the mid-1970s, before the establishment of the CLAS, then deposited in the Oral Division later. In fact, Libya's oral history collection is considered one of the earliest efforts in the region and ranks among early efforts in the world in general. As such, it could establish a cornerstone of Libyan heritage and be a key destination for

³⁵ Monsif Wanass, *El –Shakhsia El-liba: Thalouth El-kabila WA Al-ghanima wa El-Galaba* [Libyan personality : Tribe, booty, predominance] (Tunis: El-Dar Mutawastia press, 2014) 78-82.

researchers. It is essential for understanding Libyans' experience under Italian colonization, regardless of some shortcomings.

However, if the Oral Division can renew its efforts in the future, it would be well advised to make at least two key changes. First, it should engage the public with the specific goal of capturing historical testimony rather than just personal accounts. This would be especially valuable if focused on the 1950s and 1960s, as these are largely "lost" decades in Libya's history; and the people who can best shed light on the era are passing away. Currently there are fewer than ten interviews that cover these decades in CLAS' collections, and they tend to do so in only a cursory manner.

The monarchy played an integral part in the history of Libya, whether for good or bad. It presided over the establishment of Libya as an independent political entity and its first eighteen years as the new Libyan state. However, that period was neglected almost completely at exactly the time when most of the key political and diplomatic figures of the monarchical administration were alive and available. This was also when the CLAS developed, but of course, there were a lot of unofficial political restrictions against anything related to monarchy imposed by the Gaddafi regime. This helped to limit and distort the period in the public's memory.³⁶ Adding to this neglect, academic historians generally avoided writing about the period, and even those who did write on the era were confined to using a limited range of sources influenced by government propaganda.

However, the Oral Division did not entirely ignore this period, but the interviews were conducted in a way that does not shed much light on the era. Take, for example, the

³⁶ Al-Magariaf, interview by the author, October 2, 2014, Al-Magariaf's Home: Atlanta, GA, Sony T-Mark Digital Voice Recorder, mp3 format. In author's possession.

interview conducted with Ahmed Taher Zawi (1880-1986). The interview focused almost exclusively on the Libyan struggle against Italian colonization (1911-1943), despite a number of other areas in which Zawi was historically significant. He was a scholar in Sharia Law and history, becoming known as one of Libya's first historians in the twentieth century. He worked as Mufti (religious scholar) of Libya for twenty years, he was very knowledgeable about Libyan history and politics, and he knew a majority of the key figures in modern Libyan history. His long and active life as well as his connections made him an ideal subject for an oral history, and since he had opposed King Idris' policies since 1933 (when they were both in Egypt as immigrants), one could imagine that he would have been interviewed about the monarchical period. However, when the division conducted an interview with him in the early 1980s, it was only one hour and forty-three minutes long and focused almost exclusively on the period from 1911 to 1931. In regard to Libya during the monarchical period, the interviewers never asked about Zawi's opposition to and interactions with Idris. In fact, the only questions that touched on Idris asked about the role of the Sanusi Sufist order and its role in the Libyan struggle, even when Zawi's short answer clearly revealed his hostility toward Idris and the order with which he was affiliated, a response in line with the Gaddafi regime's official line on this key national leader.³⁷

We see a frustratingly similar silence on the 1950s and 1960s in the interviews of Ahmad Zarim and Mahmud Muslati, both of whom were involved in the politics of the time and opposed the King. Zarim was involved in political developments in Libya as a

³⁷ Taher Zawi, interview by CLAS staff in early 1980s, Tripoli, Libya, deposited in Oral Division Archive under 4/2.

member of the Sadawi party (the largest political party opposed to the King).

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, he served as a local politician and opposed both the monarchy and the King. However, the interview is confined solely to the resistance period against Italian colonization. The same thing happened with Mahmud Muslati's interview; Muslati was also from western Libya and an opponent of Idris, but this topic never surfaced in the interview. Perhaps they did not want to talk about the monarchy during Gaddafi's tenure, although both mentioned the Sanusi order negatively.³⁸

Another three interviews with great potential to shed light on the fifties and sixties were conducted in the mid-1970s by the staff of the History Department at Tripoli University. Wahbi El-Buri, Mahmud Abu Hidma, and Abdel Hamid El-Abar each held social and political positions that would have allowed them to interpret and explain much of the ambiguity and opacity surrounding King Idris' foreign policy. El-Buri was a politician in the Libyan government during the monarchical period who held several key positions: employee in Amiri Diwan, the "Royal Palace"; consultant in the Libyan embassy in Cairo, Egypt; Justice Minister; Foreign Ministry (1957- 1958); Minister of Petroleum; Libya's representative at the United Nations; and finally a consultant in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Furthermore, he was an historian, translator, and writer who is considered the father of the short-story genre in Libya. His non-fiction writing covered history and politics, and he translated several books on Libya into Italian. His key role in the development of Libyan-American

³⁸ Ahmad Zarim, interview by CLAS staff on April 12, Tripoli, Libya, deposited in Oral Division Archive under 5/2; Mahmud Muslati, interview by CLAS staff on July, 25 1998, deposited in Oral Division Archive under 72/2.

relations specifically and in Libyan history generally make it all the more shameful that his interview, conducted by Gar Yuns University and then deposited in the Oral Division, was only an hour and a half long and did not touch on his policymaking roles. Nor was he interviewed during any of the 32 years of his life that followed the establishment of the CLAS. By neglecting such a key politician, CLAS made one of the most embarrassing mistakes in its organizational mission of preserving Libya's history. One is led to the conclusion that political restrictions intentionally sought to efface Libya's monarchical history.

The same pattern held in the interviews of El-Abar and Abu Hidma, both of whom fought against the Italians alongside Omar Mukhtar and subsequently held notable social positions in the tribes of Cyrenaica. They also played key political roles in the nation's new history. Both served as presidents of the Senate at different times, so they were very close to the King and knew most key Libyan figures in the twentieth century. Even though El-Abar was interviewed at two different times (1975 and 1978), neither touched on the 1950s or 1960s at all. Moreover, one of the interviewers was a military officer in the Gaddafi regime rather than a historian.³⁹ In respect to the Abu Hidma interview, the CLAS staff again focused on the Libyan struggle against Italian colonization and did not touch on the period of the monarchy over the course of the seven-hour interview.⁴⁰

³⁹ Abdel Hamid Al-Abar, interview by Suliman Mahmud on August 4, 1975, Benghazi, Libya. Deposited in Oral Division Archive under 238-13; Mahmud Abu Hidma, interview by History Department staff on July 7, 1978, Tripoli, Libya, deposited in Oral Division Archive under 876/13.

⁴⁰ Mahmud Abu Hidma, interview by History Department staff on July 7, 1978, Tripoli, Libya, deposited in Oral Division Archive under 876/13.

In light of Libya's oral history experience, it is clear that public history was obviously handcuffed by political restrictions from the Gaddafi regime that sought to eliminate the monarchy from public memory. In other words, the CLAS, which was established during Gadhafi's rule, was not strong nor independent enough to conduct oral history interviews from an independent, historical perspective. As a result, much has been lost that can never be regained, as most of the leaders of this generation have died. Ultimately, there is still enough time for public history to play a crucial role in rebuilding collective memory after four handcuffed decades. This offers the possibility of rewriting that history then engaging the public with a clear past for a better future.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The lack of scholarly studies about Libyan-American relations due to political restrictions and self-censorship during the Gaddafi period has meant that the majority of studies and interpretations have been distinguished by their distortions against the monarchy. However, when it comes to writing a dissertation, having such an era to reinterpret in light of archival and oral history research provides an opportunity. In fact, being able to bring fresh perspective to Libyan-American relations in the key post-independence period has been particularly rewarding.

It is clear from examining U.S. period throughout the time period that the main engines that drove U.S. policy in Libya were always its strategic location and fear of Soviet penetration. Later, the discovery of oil added another dimension but did not fundamentally alter its earlier and preeminent interests. In this way, Libya's experience was different than U.S. relations with other Middle Eastern countries—like Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states—that were primarily focused on economics from the beginning. Driven by a variety of interests in Libya, the United States brought pressure to bear on the new North African government throughout this time period. This was particularly obvious in the negotiations about the temporary agreement for Wheelus in 1951 that was forced upon the provisional government on the eve of independence. As Libya grew in strength and resources, the United States' ability to influence policy in the North African government declined. This was evident in the subsequent and prolonged negotiations around a permanent base agreement, in the limited U.S. ability to coordinate

its policy toward Libya with Great Britain, and in its increasing desperation to maintain Wheelus following the discovery of oil in Libya.

However, this dissertation has also sought to clearly identify the multiple strategies that the first Libyan government used—with varying success—to play the weak hand it had been dealt as well as it could. Before independence, the provisional government used delay as its primary strategy. Following independence, Libyan Prime Minister Muntasir (1951-1953) used parliamentary discontent to improve the terms of the temporary U.S. base deal at Wheelus. Indeed, he achieved some successes using this strategy. But when Bin Halim succeeded him, he ignored Parliament and concluded the agreement to prove himself effective as Libya's new leader. He sought to develop cordial relations with the United States as the best way to get a strong base-rights deal. To gain ratification of the agreement, however, he played regional politics (eastern vs. western Libya) in moving the new nation's capital. Libyans also used the possibility of stronger relations with the Soviet Union as a ploy to attract higher amounts of American aid. While Libyan foreign policy in the early national period can be criticized or praised, it must be considered based on a realistic assessment of what of accomplished and the context in which it negotiated these relations.

A decided obstacle in the way of either the Libyan or American governments achieving their goals was the popular attachment to Nasserism. All of the oral histories conducted for this study reveal the pervasiveness of this sentiment, and both Libyan and American officials frequently pointed to popular sentiment as a potential obstacle to their goals and as a danger to future relations between the two countries. The anti-Western,

pan-Arab views spread by Nasserist propaganda that appeared in Libyan newspapers and on the airwaves had a powerful impact on the local population and created popular sentiment that opposed the continuation of the base agreement at Wheelus, especially after the discovery of oil. The pervasiveness of Nasserism also played a significant role in precipitating the end of the Kingdom of Libya. As the Libyan people became increasingly anti-Western, the King seems to have grown increasingly close to both Britain and the United States as the best way of protecting his rule and country.

From the point of view of international relations, ultimately, relations between Libya and the United States during the 1950s, despite the unequal balance between the two countries, presented a significant and productive level of cooperation. Bin Halim's term as prime minister (1954-1957) can be considered the golden era of Libyan-American relations from the U.S. perspective, because he recognized the importance of cooperation with the United States and played a crucial in facilitating these relations. However, Mahmoud Muntasir's term as Prime Minister (1951-1954) was characterized by a jealous guarding of Libyan sovereignty and by a commitment to getting a fair deal from the U.S. for the valuable real estate of Wheelus field. Ultimately, the story of Libya's relations with the United States during this time period most clearly illustrates the ideas of classical realism theory.

The discovery of oil affected both Libya and the United States and caused both sides to review their policies toward each other. Although the United States reviewed its policy, a continued military presence continued to be its top priority; over time, adding access joined the American list of priorities in the country. For Libya, the discovery of

oil enhanced its position toward the United States and gave it more flexibility than ever in terms of managing its economy and foreign policy. However, it also added to the rising chorus of popular opinion calling for the liquidation of foreign bases, which were no longer able to be justified based on the need for rent and foreign aid. Ironically, Libya's oil wealth added volume to Nasserism in the country and helped to undermine the government and its relations with its strongest ally.

Although Libyan oral history is contentious and full of challenges as a consequence of four decades of Gaddafi's rule, it still provides a small window and "more details"—especially on Egyptian influence—on this neglected period in Libyan history. I remain very optimistic for the future of public history in Libya, because this picture could help to engage a public audience with the past, which has the potential for changing stereotypes created in the Gaddafi period. However, it is important to recognize the very real and continuing social and cultural challenges to quality oral history in the country. Some of these have been exacerbated as a result of the Arab Spring period and its aftermath (2011-2018). Perhaps collaborations between public historians and those in other areas—including anthropology, sociology, and social work—could help to develop new theory to address these challenges.

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