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Libyans can overcome their current predicament

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“Libya is large enough for all components of the society, provided we arm ourselves with good intentions and good faith in the other.”

Libya is facing enormous challenges in its transition phase, especially now when the state apparatus has failed to rein in the various lawless armed militias. The state is no longer able to enforce the law and protect citizens as the country slips into more and more chaos.

Amid the political squabbling and hunger for power, the mere existence of Libya as a unified state is in jeopardy. As long as the military and security institutions in Libya remain disunited, there will be no chance for laying the foundations of the rule of law. The local political forces are weak and unable to start a constructive dialogue, let alone find a solution to the crisis; so they remain locked in a bitter struggle for power.

Many regional and international powers find their interests better served if Libya is in civil turmoil. The country is incapable of defending its airspace and its maritime and land borders, making it possible for organised crime, piracy and illegal migration to thrive. Pushed by unbearable economic hardships, some Libyan citizens have resorted to begging to survive while others have turned to crime. The state can no longer provide basic protection, so some citizens have taken the law into their own hands.

Years of pervasive corruption in the administrative and financial institutions have driven the country into bankruptcy. Citizens have been stripped of their possessions and rights while criminals roam undisturbed. As long as criminals and corrupt officials in Libya continue to escape the law, the cycle of violence will continue.

Jails in Libya are bursting with people detained without any probable cause. Their detention may last for years without investigation or trial. Thousands of Libyans have been displaced for no apparent reason. Discrimination is rife, making it impossible to put in practice the principle of equality before the law. Extremist thinking and behaviour have seeped deep into Libyan society.

In Libya today, widespread unemployment is pushing the youth into the arms of the militias. Those who have been in the militias for some years now are finding it difficult to adjust to civil life. The same years of political strife have almost wiped out any progress and social gains achieved by Libyan women. Thousands of Libyan children are denied their right to education because their schools have either been destroyed or closed. In short, Libya today is failing to ensure a decent living for its citizens.

Given all of the above, how can

Libya reverse the downward spiral and restore the rule of law to guarantee decent living conditions for every citizen? I firmly believe that a political solution remains the best way out of the crisis in Libya. A military approach will never work. With the exception of the war on terror, a military force-based approach is incompatible with the requirements for dialogue and will definitely make the situation in Libya worse. Force always leads to failure. We must first work on creating the right conditions for a constructive dialogue between the various warring parties in Libya.

Libya is large enough for all components of the society, provided we arm ourselves with good intentions and good faith in the other. Those who would be involved in the dialogue must be worthy of taking part in the dialogue; in other words, they must be willing to exchange ideas and listen to alternative views.

This dialogue will be the starting point of the process leading to a real national consensus perhaps based on the 2015 political agreement under the auspices of the UN mission to Libya. If all parties in the conflict adopt the 32 principles of that agreement, we might soon be out of the woods.

No solution to the Libyan crisis will be possible as long as there

continues to be more than one central authority.

To ease the predicament of Libyan citizens, the legislative, executive and judicial powers in Libya must go back to working together as one. There must be an end to the rampant corruption and public mismanagement. The Libyan revolution did put an end to a totalitarian regime but has been nowhere close to rebuilding a civil state. Libya's youth, in particular, must believe in their capacity to change things for the better and must enlist in Libya's national project rather than believe in rogue militias.

The main cause of the Libyan crisis is the political leadership in the country. The current leaders are obsessed with power and working for the common good is the last thing on their minds. One would think that the sorry fate of the previous regime would have taught them a lesson, but while revolutions change everything else, man will remain the same.

With the right person at the right spot and with unity, the Libyan people can and will overcome their current predicament. We have done it before and we can do it again. I will end with a quote by Omar Mokhtar, Libya's emblematic martyr: "I believe in my right to liberty and in my country's right to life. This belief is stronger than any weapon."

Are the Rohingyas the new Palestinians?

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“Extremist expressions of solidarity with the Rohingyas are the last thing they need.”

Are the Rohingyas the new Palestinians? They share the following descriptors: The disinherited, the dispossessed and the damned. And the world has begun to use the same adjectives for both groups.

For example, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres this week called the Rohingyas' plight a "tragedy." In August, he described the Palestinian situation as "tragic." The Rohingyas, a stateless minority in Myanmar, are on course to becoming like the Palestinians, a cause celebre for the Muslim world.

Consider the official response from countries in the Middle East and North Africa region to the three-week-old "clearance operations" of Rohingya villages by Myanmar's army.

Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called on Muslim governments to apply political and economic pressure on Myanmar to stop the crackdown on the Rohingyas.

On the sidelines of last week's Organisation of Islamic Cooperation summit on science and technology in Astana, the Turkish and Iranian presidents called for cooperation in offering aid to the Rohingyas.

Iran's president, Hassan

Rohani, placed the Rohingyas' pitiable situation alongside other gaping wounds in the Muslim world, not least Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Palestine. They show the need for unity, he said, especially in terms of forcing governments that adhere to "American and European human rights." It was an unobvious dig at alleged Western double standards on human rights issues.

And Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made an urgent phone call to Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, to express the Muslim world's concern over increased violations of Rohingyas' human rights.

The Muslim world's official reaction to the Rohingyas' persecution and displacement - nearly 400,000 have been forced to flee to Bangladesh since late August - goes beyond the MENA region. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov used his official Instagram account to label the attacks a "genocide." Malaysia's foreign minister summoned Myanmar's ambassador to express concern. His Indonesian counterpart flew to Myanmar for talks with Suu Kyi. And Pakistan's foreign minister recorded his "deep anguish" at the "deplorable" violence.

Alarming, extremists' reactions have somewhat upstaged that of governments. Al-Qaeda has warned of retali-

tory attacks against Myanmar for its "savage treatment meted out to our Muslim brothers." A senior leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has called on "mujahid brothers in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and the Philippines to set out for Burma," referring to Myanmar's former name. The Afghan Taliban has issued a statement calling "on Muslims worldwide to not forget these oppressed brothers of yours."

Extremist expressions of solidarity with the Rohingyas are the last thing they need. It may embolden the Myanmar authorities in their crackdown on people they already call "terrorists." And it's obvious that the jihadist groups patently seek only to capitalise on this most recent example of injustice to Muslims.

Some might say that the exaggerated concern shown by Erdogan and Kadyrov are similarly self-serving. Grandstanding on human rights violations may help position them as global Muslim leaders but it sits oddly with strong-arm tactics at home.

That said, the Rohingyas' distress has undoubtedly struck a chord among people from Iran to Chechnya. In the Chechen capital, Grozny, tens of thousands took to the streets in solidarity with the Rohingyas. Smaller protests occurred outside Myanmar embassies around the

world, including in Indonesia, Pakistan, Germany and Australia. In the absence of a Myanmar embassy in Tehran, Iranian students protested at the UN office.

For all intents and purposes, the Rohingyas are acquiring a status so far only given to the Palestinians. They are becoming a symbol of global injustice to Muslims. Once the Palestinians were, in the words of former US State Department official Jared Cohen, the crucial "winning issue" that extremists employed to recruit and inflame. Now, it may be the Rohingyas too.

Cohen, senior adviser to two US secretaries of state, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton, has memorably described the Palestinian issue's ability to outrage and oppress Muslims around the world. "Why do young people in Algeria, unemployed and living in poverty, tell me that their primary grievance in life is the fact that the Palestinians do not have a state? What makes 10,000 Indonesians march against violence in Gaza, but not Indonesian casualties at the hands of Jamaat Islamiya or al-Qaeda?"

For the moment, the Rohingyas are the focus of a globally amplified storyline that only ever had Palestinians in starring roles. It may not last long but it is powerful while it lasts.

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