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INFORMATION MEMO FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM: NEA - Beth Jones, Acting

SUBJECT: (C) Security Situation in Libya: A Spike in Violence or a New Normal?

Overall Security Situation

(C) Libya has experienced an upward trend in violence - primarily but not exclusively in the east - since May. It is not yet clear if this trend will reverse itself as earlier ones have over the past year or if, in eastern Libya at least, it constitutes a new normal. The ongoing presence of militias is a complicating factor, both providing security in many areas where the national government cannot, and undercutting it in others. Militias were seen as a constructive force during the July 7 elections for the General National Congress. The central security services are still being reconstituted and do not have the capacity to force the militias under a national authority. While unpredictable security conditions restrict the movement of U.S. government personnel, they have not limited our assistance work. The violence has not targeted the oil and gas infrastructure.

Uptick in Violence, Primarily in Eastern Libya

(SBU) Since May, there has been a spike in violent incidents, including bombings, abductions, assassinations, and car-jackings. The attachment lists the major events, which include a June 6 bombing at the U.S. Mission in Benghazi and an August 6 attempted car-jacking of embassy personnel in Tripoli. Recently, foreign residents of Benghazi have expressed concern about the risks of living and working there. In response to five attacks since May, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) withdrew its personnel from Benghazi and Misrata in early August, but continued work in the rest of Libya. The ICRC country director believes international organizations in Libya have underestimated the recent rise in violence out of a shared sense of optimism.

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Charles Daris, Senior Reviewer

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Classified by: NEA Assistant Secretary Beth Jones, Acting
E.O. 13526, Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

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Emboldened but Random

(C) The variety of the violence points to the overall lack of effective security institutions, particularly in the east. Local contacts blame pro-Qadhafi element efforts to destabilize the government, militia vigilante action, extremist Islamist groups settling scores, and criminally motivated thugs for most of the incidents. The distance from the already weak central security services, feelings of marginalization from the central government, and a history of Islamist extremism in some eastern towns all seem to contribute to a permissive environment where disparate motivations for violence have found fertile ground in which to germinate. The national Supreme Security Council – a post-revolutionary coalition of militia elements cobbled into a single force and designed to provide interim security in Benghazi – has had limited success as a stabilizing force.

(C) The government seems largely unable to gather intelligence in advance of attacks and central security services appear intimidated by the local militias, in some cases tacitly ceding their authority to them. Some actors see the weak response from the government and feel they can act with increasing impunity. The sense of lawlessness encourages spoilers, predators, and other disruptive players to escalate their actions.

The Transition Requires Security

(C) Benghazi was once palpably safer than Tripoli, but in the absence of a national political consensus on fundamental issues, lawlessness is increasing. The newly seated General National Congress should address the security situation directly to reassert control. Despite the urgency, however, the government's response is likely to continue to be hesitant and tentative, as it focuses on maintaining momentum and cohesion for the challenging political transition it is undertaking. Efforts to rebuild the national military and police forces (including the incorporation of some militias into the national forces) will need to proceed in step with efforts to create the right package of educational, vocational, and monetary incentives to demobilize, disarm, and reintegrate the revolutionary fighters into civilian life. We are working to assist the Libyans through advice on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration and reconstituting elements of their national security forces through capacity building for counterterrorism and border security activities through classroom and field training.

(C) Despite the worrisome aspects of this increase in violence, there is no coordinated organization behind the incidents. Ethnic, sectarian, and tribal differences have not been major factors in causing or exacerbating the violence; in fact, there is some evidence that traditional tribal structures are helping to contain

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it. Nonetheless, the likelihood of more widespread violence is strong if Libya's political leaders are unable to demobilize militias and strengthen the government's security institutions.

Attachment:

List of Recent Violence in Libya

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SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

List of Recent Violence in Libya

- June 6: Bombing at the U.S. Mission in Benghazi.
- June 11: The British ambassador to Libya's convoy was attacked with grenades while driving through Benghazi.
- July 31: Seven Iranian ICRC members were abducted in Benghazi; they remain detained.
- July 31: Car-jacking of the Sudanese consul.
- August 1: Bombing at the military intelligence office, apparently coordinated with a prison break which released an Islamist suspect charged in the August 2011 assassination of the Transitional National Council Chief of Staff General Abdul-Fattah Younis.
- August 5: The ICRC's office in Misrata was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades, the fifth time ICRC had been targeted over the past three months, causing the international organization to withdraw its representatives from Misrata and Benghazi.
- August 6: Attempted car-jacking of U.S. embassy personnel in Tripoli.
- August 10: Killing of Libyan Army Brigadier General Mohamed Haddiyah, an early defector from the Qadhafi regime who played a key military role supporting the revolution.
- As many as 15 former regime officials have been assassinated in Benghazi between March and August 2012.