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LIBYA MATTERS



Sir Vincent Fean's 39 years of diplomatic experience include being Consul-General in Jerusalem until 2014, Ambassador to Libya (2006-10), and High Commissioner to Malta. An effective advocate for UK business in the Middle East, using strong Arabic and French language skills. He has chaired the Libyan British Business Council since March 2016.

Libya matters to Britain for business, counter-terrorism and migration. Libyans are tired after 4 years of political division, economic turmoil, too many guns and crime on their streets. Can Boris and his seasoned Deputy Alistair Burt achieve a consensus among regional and international powers, paving the way for a Libyan/Libyan solution that works?

The Libyans who ousted Dictator Muammar al Qadhafi in 2011 were dealt a bad hand. He had spent 40 years hollowing out the apparatus of government, so almost all the institutions they inherited crumbled when touched. He banned political parties and NGOs, very effectively. His regime fell leaving debts owed to a number of British businesses committed to Libya, but which need those debts to be settled before they can re engage. Libya has been learning how to govern itself by trial and error; mostly error. There are three institutions which survived Qadhafi, and are a basis for economic recovery: the Central Bank, the National Oil Corporation and the Sovereign Wealth Fund (aka the Libyan Investment Authority, whose \$67 billion assets are frozen by the UN until Libya has one government, not three).

Business

Libya is rich, with the third largest reserves of oil and gas in Africa, and a population of just 6 million, in a country three times bigger than France. Libya exports oil and gas and imports almost all that a country needs, except water. Many of the Libyans now trying to make a go of things undertook postgraduate study here in the U.K. President Trump's foolish travel ban on all Libyans means that more young middle class Libyans want to come here to study, and technicians want to come to be trained. The US has played itself out of the game, but Italy, France, Germany and Spain have not. The Libyan British Business Council (www.lbbsc.org) has 75 British, Libyan and multinational companies as members, working for the day when Libya comes back, and in close touch with those three Libyan institutions, with their offshoots, and with the private sector. The LBBC and BACB Bank will take a trade mission to Tunis on 20-22 November to meet Libyan state businesses and private sector companies from all parts of Libya. The focus is on Libya's most

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pressing needs in oil and gas, training, electricity, financial services, health/pharma and infrastructure. Libya will come good – the question is when. What is clear is that for ordinary Libyans, safety and security for their families take precedence. They want a government that works: one law, one gun. They will back a government that delivers security and basic services – ATM machines with cash in them, medicines in the pharmacies, food in the shops, electricity 24/7. The rest will follow.

Today Libya is spending more than she earns, though oil production is back up to 1 million barrels a day, despite political instability. The economy is over dependent on oil, but for now the only policy choice is to increase oil production. In time, the economy needs to be diversified, with a sustained effort at Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration – the jargon for giving the men with guns useful alternative employment, and tackling criminality. The public sector payroll has grown unsustainably – mainly because all the men with guns are on that payroll, with most of them doing nothing which merits any pay, and some of them supplementing that income by crime.

Migration

Qadhafi could turn on and off seaborne irregular migration from Libya to Europe – but even he struggled to control the flow. It's worse now, with no effective Libyan control. The desperate souls who pay criminal traffickers and risk their own and their children's lives are not Libyan, but from parts of Francophone and Commonwealth Africa, the Horn, and even Asia. Over 85,000 have reached Italy so far this year. Many have drowned in the attempt. This abomination will continue until Libya has a proper government, which will need much help – the migrant detention centres in Libya are appalling.

Da'esh

The self-styled Islamic State likes a power vacuum, and has profited from the one in Libya. Most Libyans hate it. Da'esh has been expelled from Derna by local people, and from Qadhafi's city of Sirte by the Misurata militia which supports the Government of National Accord. Da'esh has been dispersed, but hasn't gone away. Many of its young militants are non-Libyan, especially from neighbouring Tunisia.

Send for Boris?

Libya's recovery after the 2011 Revolution has been hampered by many things, not least the short-sighted self-promotion of regional and international powers, playing off one Libyan militia against another to no great effect. The honour roll of interference is long: Egypt seeking a more secure western border by backing Field Marshall Haftar; Qatar and Turkey backing Islamists of various stripes; the UAE and Saudi Arabia doing the opposite from Qatar... and Russia out for what she can get.

Britain and France have something to prove, having bombed and strafed Qadhafi's forces in 2011 when he threatened massacre in Benghazi. That led to regime change. Today Libyans need help with regime consolidation and minimal external intervention. The Foreign Secretary visited Libya in May. He and his

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able Deputy, Alistair Burt, are alert to the urgent need for international consensus on both counts: internal stability and external non- interference.

The good news is that the UN Secretary General has just appointed an effective Arab negotiator as his Special Representative to Libya – Lebanese former Minister Ghassan Salame. He has the required skills to bring the right Libyans together. He will need space and time and strong international support.

So a suggestion: a British/French/Italian political initiative to read the riot act to regional players and the rest, encouraging Libyans to talk to Libyans with Salame's help to sort out their shared future. Libyan Prime Minister Serraj is talking to General Haftar. That dialogue needs to reach agreement, and to go wider. Libya's leaders need to gain domestic credibility by showing that they have both a determination and the means to crack down on the criminality which is plaguing the country, particularly now in western Libya. Then the issues of direct concern to Britain can be tackled by a Libyan government with the stickability to do business, rebuild the country's infrastructure, and fight terrorism/criminality. It needs doing, for Libya's good and for ours. Will Boris heed the call?

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