



Oral evidence: [Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options](#),

HC 520

Tuesday 13 October 2015

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 October 2015

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present:

Foreign Affairs Committee: Crispin Blunt (Chair); Mr John Baron; Ann Clwyd; Mike Gapes; Stephen Gethins; Mr Mark Hendrick; Adam Holloway; Daniel Kawczynski; Yasmin Qureshi; Andrew Rosindell; Nadhim Zahawi

Questions 1-86

Witnesses: **Professor George Joffé**, Visiting Professor, King's College London, and **Alison Pargeter**, Analyst, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. It is our first evidence-taking session in our inquiry on Libya. We welcome Alison Pargeter and Professor George Joffé. I understand there was some difficulty in finding one's way into this building, for which I apologise. Our invitation ought to have enabled you to leap to the front of the queue. I am very sorry about that, but we are particularly grateful that you didn't take to your heels and leave us.

I have already explained to colleagues that we are hoping that, as witnesses, you will help to inform the Committee and begin to shape our inquiry by giving us information on the issues we ought to be pursuing in the course of the inquiry. In no sense do we see you as anything other than helpful, co-operative witnesses, so feel free, if you think there are things that we have not asked you but are important for us to be aware of, to make sure those are included in your evidence. Equally, at the end of this session, if you feel that we have managed to so conduct questioning that we have not got the best out of you and might be in danger of not having a full understanding, please supplement your evidence with written evidence.

I would like to take us back to events in 2011 and the intervention decision and to ask you what your analysis was of the evidence that the Gaddafi regime was actually planning and preparing to massacre civilians in Benghazi in the way that was widely reported in the media at the time.

Alison Pargeter: Obviously, it was a very chaotic time. It's difficult to ascertain exactly what was going on on the ground. Gaddafi had always been a rather unpredictable

figure, with a history of brutality, but I can't see there was any real evidence at that time that Gaddafi was preparing to launch a massacre against his own civilians.

Gaddafi had already retaken other towns in the east. There had been no large-scale massacre there—for example, in Ajdabiya. Actually, the regime's initial reaction after the uprising started in Benghazi was to try to reach out and appease some of the rebels. Gaddafi sent his son Saadi out to Benghazi and he promised them lots of development assistance—was sort of pleading with them. Saif al-Islam was pleading with some of the Islamist prisoners that he had released from prison over the last couple of years. He also released a load more Islamist prisoners as a sort of gesture of appeasement. So I don't think the evidence is there that he was going to go and launch some widespread massacre. I don't think it would have been in his interests to do so. He would have alienated a lot of the tribes in the east of Libya. He relied on those tribes socially. I think he would have gone back and chased—gone after—the rebels, the people who were armed, and he would have shown them no mercy whatsoever. It would have been bloody, but I don't think that would have evolved into some kind of massacre. If you look at the famous speech—"I'm going to hunt them down street by street"—actually what he said at the beginning was, "I'm going to go for the bearded ones." In Gaddafi's head, this was an Islamist rebellion, and he was going to go and hunt down those who were responsible. So yes, it would have been bloody; yes, Gaddafi was a brutal dictator, but I don't see evidence of some large-scale massacre of civilians in Benghazi. But George might see it differently.

Professor Joffé: I am tempted just to say that I agree with my colleague, because I think what she says is completely right. It is certainly true that the rhetoric that was used was quite blood-curdling, but again there were past examples of the way in which Gaddafi would actually behave. If you go back to the American bombings in the 1980s of Benghazi and Tripoli, rather than trying to remove threats to the regime in the east, in Cyrenaica, Gaddafi spent six months trying to pacify the tribes that were located there. The evidence is that he was well aware of the insecurity of parts of the country and of the unlikelihood that he could control them through sheer violence. Therefore, he would have been very careful in the actual response.

It is certainly true, too, that his major fear was of an Islamist threat, but even with the major Islamist group, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, when they were captured they were not executed; they were actually put in prison. There was, it is true, a prison massacre, in 1996, but that was a quite separate incident that was provoked by the internal structure of the prison inside Tripoli.

Therefore, in a sense, I think the fear of the massacre of civilians was vastly overstated. It also should be borne in mind that the forces that Gaddafi had available to him were relatively limited. The army had been depleted. It is believed only a third of its strength was actually operative. It had to rely to some extent on mercenary forces. They were not necessarily reliable. The evidence was that it would have been very difficult for him to carry out the kind of massacres that people anticipated. So again, I don't really think there was any danger of the kind of massacre of civilians that was suggested at the time.

Q2 Chair: I have seen a suggestion that the western position was perhaps manipulated by the reports of this threat being driven by people who had an agenda to trigger an intervention. Have you seen or are you aware of any evidence to that effect?

Professor Joffé: It is certainly true that there were people in the east—and don't forget there is actually a set of precursor events to the uprising that took place inside Benghazi—who were anxious to challenge the regime. Indeed, there had been over the previous few years a series of challenges to the regime from the east, from Cyrenaica. Given that, it is not surprising that when given the opportunity, demonstrations began, to which the police reacted very badly, and that in itself provoked further demonstrations. It was the sense of losing control that really scared the authorities in Tripoli and led to Gaddafi sending two of his sons to try to quieten the situation there. So again, yes, there were people who wanted to challenge the regime. There were people who wanted to see it change. There were certainly people abroad who believed the moment had come for Libya to repeat the kind of experiences that had occurred recently in Tunisia and, indeed, in Egypt. For those reasons, I think one can safely say there were people determined to exploit the situation.

Alison Pargeter: I would add that I think that certainly the issue of mercenaries was amplified. I was told by Libyans here, "The Africans are coming. They're going to massacre us. Gaddafi's sending Africans into the streets. They're killing our families." I think that that was very much amplified. But I also think the Arab media played a very important role here. Al-Jazeera in particular, but also al-Arabiya, were reporting that Gaddafi was using air strikes against people in Benghazi and, I think, were really hamming everything up, and it turned out not to be true. I think that probably played an important role.

Q3 Chair: In terms of understanding the environment in which the intervention decision was being driven by the United Kingdom and France, how much did policymakers in the UK actually understand the battle picture being presented to them and that the threat in Benghazi was not as great as that presented in latter-day rhetoric from both the President of the United States and very recently from our Minister for the Middle East? In an article as recently as 21 August, the Minister said that the whole purpose was to avoid a bloodbath in Benghazi. It seems to have passed into received wisdom that that was the objective. How much did our policymakers and their advisers, from what you know, appreciate the actual situation they were presented with?

Professor Joffé: There was a relatively limited understanding of events inside Libya. Don't forget that for many years before, Britain had not had formal diplomatic relations with Libya. Those had only started up a few years before the events of 2011. Although there had been an approach from the then Prime Minister to welcome the regime back, there was none the less a great suspicion in large parts of the British establishment against too close relations with Libya. For example, there was a row about the aftermath and sequelae of Lockerbie.

In a sense, people had not really bothered to monitor closely what was occurring in Libya. Again, I think the decision in Britain was partly driven by decisions in France. In France, the decisions of President Sarkozy and his Administration were driven by Libyan exiles getting allies within the French intellectual establishment who were anxious to push for a real change in Libya to persuade the President to support them. In a way, it was a rolling stone that gathered speed and effectiveness and with which Britain then became involved.

Q4 Chair: So you would see Sarkozy as a more important initiator of this than our Prime Minister, in the sense of driving the policy.

Professor Joffé: I think that is probably the case. My impression, which can only be an impression as I do not have access to detailed information from the inside, was that the real push began in France and then was taken up over here.

Q5 Chair: Would that reflect the fact that if we invested in any succession strategy in Libya, it was our relationship with Saif Gaddafi, reflected in his relationship with the London School of Economics, which came out of the Blair deal in the desert, and that it was almost a natural progression of policy, and that there was no alternative British strategy in Libya?

Professor Joffé: Certainly under the Labour Government, that appears to have been the strategy. Again, I cannot comment in detail, because I do not have inside knowledge of this, but it is certainly the case that the access that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi had in Britain was the consequence of that opening up initially. Whether the opening up with the LSE evolved into some penetration into the decisions of Government, that I do not know and think probably unlikely, but it is certainly true that there had been a general welcome of the opening up, the possibilities for trade and the renewal of contracts with Libya. Quite why it was decided that those should be abandoned at the beginning of 2011 has never really been clear to me. I have no idea to what extent that was based on firm evidence or to what extent it was based on personal prejudice or preference in terms of the reactions that were then planned.

Alison Pargeter: I agree with a lot of what George says. Again, I do not know, as I was not in the corridors of power, but my feeling from the Foreign Office was, “This is Britain’s moment with the Arab spring. This is our opportunity. We are going to go in and ride the crest of the wave and be a force for good and a force for change.” I had a sense of people rubbing their hands saying, “This is our moment to get in and get rid of Gaddafi. He has been a pain. He was very much tied up with Blair and the Labour party. This is our moment to change things on the ground.”

In terms of understanding within the corridors of power of what was happening inside Libya, what always shocked me was why no one was asking why the uprising was taking place in Benghazi and the same thing was not happening in Tripoli. I do not know whether that was put down to people’s fear of rising up, but I think that the situation on the ground as we see now is a lot more complex than that. Why were those kinds of questions not being asked? This was a rebellion in Benghazi, specifically. Given the history and the regional complexities of Libya, my impression was that that question was not being asked, and it should have been. There was a sense that this was a widespread nationalist rebellion, as we had seen in Tunisia and other places.

Q6 Mr Baron: Those of us who voted against the intervention always had a nagging doubt that we did not really understand what was happening on the ground, but also that this was just as much about regime change as it was about saving the citizens of Benghazi, laudable though that aim was. Can you tell us more about your views on the regime change? The events on the ground seem to bear that out, because the targeting of Gaddafi, even down to his Winnebago and all the rest of it, seemed to go well beyond saving the citizens of Benghazi.

I suppose my question to you is: how much do you think this was driven by a desire for regime change? Perhaps the more difficult question is: why regime change, when only a few

years previously we had had hugs in the desert, al-Qaeda was not operating in Libya under Gaddafi and he was turning to the west?

Professor Joffé: I think to answer that you need to go back rather further, maybe to 1984 and to the sense then, after the massacre in St James's Square when Yvonne Fletcher was killed, that Libya had become unacceptable as an international partner. Don't forget that at that time, Libya had been involved in supporting terrorist groups in the Middle East and a series of quite violent massacres that had taken place there. Libya was seen as being completely beyond the pale. It was interesting to note that up until then, on every occasion on which there had been a crisis, Libyans had always felt that they had access through the Foreign Office to be able to calm things down. On this occasion, that proved to be completely impossible.

Q7 Mr Baron: May I interrupt for a moment? I accept everything that you are saying, and we are fully aware of the history. They supported the IRA, by the way, and so on. Having served in Northern Ireland, one remembers those things. But Libya had been embraced in the desert. There had been hugs in the desert. Oilfields were being opened up to the west. There were no al-Qaeda in Libya. They were slowly turning towards the west. It was not a nice regime—don't get me wrong—but there was still a movement in our direction, and yet, suddenly, certainly France and Britain decided that regime change seemed to be the better option.

Professor Joffé: The point I am trying to make is that even though there was a desire to see Libya turning towards the west and to engage it in doing so, at another level inside the Administration and inside the political structures here there was still a very deep suspicion and a very deep dislike of the Gaddafi regime. So, in a sense, even though those changes may have been occurring, they were superficial.

When an opportunity came about where the regime appeared to be bankrupt and therefore no long really sustainable, I think there was a desire to speed the process on and to take advantage of what appeared to be happening in 2011, when there was a general move against the whole idea of autocratic regimes in the Middle East and towards their replacement by democratic regimes instead, as the Tunisian example and the Egyptian example seemed to show.

I have to say that I think that was a very naive view, because it demonstrated a complete lack of understanding of the process of political transition, and particularly of the process of political transition in the wake of the colour revolutions that had occurred in eastern Europe and in Lebanon. But I think that was in fact one of the drivers. This is an opportunity; let's exploit it. Let's get rid of somebody whom we have long disliked, even though we embraced him temporarily. That was the real driver.

Alison Pargeter: Gaddafi may have been rehabilitated, but he was still an irritant. He was still seen as unpredictable. There were also a lot of concerns at the time about what was going to come next—what was going to come after Gaddafi. There was a lot of discussion about who was going to take over and how that regime was going to continue.

Q8 Mr Baron: One final question, if I may. From your answers, I sense that you concur with the idea that this was just as much about regime change as it was about saving the citizens of Benghazi, so we will take that on record. May I share with you one thought? What part did the release of Megrahi play in all this? Those of us who were on the Foreign Affairs Committee visit to Washington—I think it was in the beginning of 2011, or in 2010, I can't remember—were struck by the hostility, almost, of the Americans about the release of Megrahi. There we were, entering a room with our counterparts, thinking we were going to talk about Iraq and Afghanistan—we had just lost some soldiers there—but all they wanted to talk about was the release of Megrahi, and there was, one felt, real anger there. To what extent do you think that that was a part of the decision to actually almost do a U-turn in our approach to Libya and decide to intervene and kick the door down?

Professor Joffé: I think it played a very significant part. Even in this country there was a profound degree of disquiet over the fact of his release and his return to Libya, so in a way what you saw in the United States was an exaggerated form of the distrust that existed here too; and it was not just over that. There were other crises at the same time. There had been the matter of the revelation of the prison massacre in Abu Salim prison in 1996; there had been the evidence of the HIV-AIDS crisis in Benghazi thereafter. So in a way the ground was prepared.

No one really believed that Gaddafi had fundamentally changed, even if they were prepared to engage with him because he, being opportunistic, had recognised that he could not resist—and he had recognised that in 1987—pressure from the west and would have to compound with it on some occasion. So yes, I think what you saw in the United States reflected a very deep feeling there, and one that was replicated, perhaps to a lesser degree, over here as well. Then again in France, Sarkozy himself, just after he came to power, had been involved in the release of the Palestinians and Bulgarians who had been accused of responsibility for the AIDS crisis in Benghazi; and that, too, played a part. So all these things, I think, came together.

If I could just add a point about the question of the African mercenaries who played a very large part in creating a mythology of a threat to civilians, you need to bear in mind that in September 2000 there had been a series of violent riots in western Libya, involving Africans, because Colonel Gaddafi, when he changed policy away from the Arab world towards Africa as the entity of which Libya was an integral part, had allowed free immigration of Africans into Libya itself, and that had created enormous local tensions. So in a way although he had appeared to change as far as we were concerned, in reality very little had changed.

Alison Pargeter: I have nothing to add on Megrahi. I just do not know.

Q9 Daniel Kawczynski: I have got a very strong interest in this, because I was very much opposed to the rapprochement with Gaddafi by the previous Labour Government, and challenged David Miliband, the then Foreign Secretary. We even took the family of PC Yvonne Fletcher in to meet David Miliband, and I was told by senior Labour Ministers at the time to shut up and to stop rocking the boat, because they were involved in very intrinsic discussions with Colonel Gaddafi. That led me to write a book about him and all the human rights atrocities that he carried out in that country.

My question to you is, with regard to regime change Russia abstained in the UN Security Council, but President Putin has asked questions as to how it is possible that Colonel Gaddafi was targeted in such a way, deliberately, to kill him, with western forces and intelligence being sent to pursue his convoy as he was trying to escape. Is this not a flagrant breach of what we were mandated to do at the time—as to what actually happened in the end?

Professor Joffé: Well, if you talk to NATO, and particularly to the targeting groups that were involved in the operations in Libya, they felt very badly about that, because they regard themselves as not being directly responsible, and the actual planning and use of assets to target his convoy right at the end was a decision taken elsewhere. In a sense, they would therefore agree with you that the provisions of the two resolutions—1970 and 1973—were in fact breached in that action, as they had been in previous actions too; because there had been a series of actions that had taken place outside the context of the resolutions themselves. But don't forget that the states involved in doing that were not just European states; there were also Arab states, and Turkey, as well.

Alison Pargeter: I would agree.

Q10 Daniel Kawczynski: One follow-up question, very quickly: on the point of the coverage, I remember that on, I think, 11 February 2011 we were watching back-to-back coverage of Sky News about what Colonel Gaddafi was going to do, and the famous speech you have referred to—

Professor Joffé: I think you mean 18 February.

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, 18 February, forgive me—“Shiber shiber, ferd ferd, zenga zenga!”—and I was surprised at the ferocity, the ongoing coverage by Sky News and the information it was giving out that there was going to be a bloodbath. What is your opinion on the way that Sky News and others reported that at that time, and how that went on to influence decision makers like myself and others to urge the Prime Minister to take action?

Professor Joffé: I am not sure I can comment meaningfully on that. At the time, my impression was that the news coverage reflected the general view, not just in the media but in the political establishment, of what Colonel Gaddafi represented. Again, I think there was a driving sense of the opportunity being created in which the regime could be removed, and a kind of tacit collaboration in creating the atmosphere in which that could be more easily done.

Alison Pargeter: I absolutely agree.

Q11 Chair: Since we are on the subject of the killing of Mr Gaddafi, who killed him, in your view?

Professor Joffé: He was actually killed by a member of one of the militias, a man who was himself later killed—in Bani Walid, I think—who was just part of the group that was attacking Sirte.

Alison Pargeter: That is my understanding of the situation, as well. It was a militia force from Misrata that found him in the sewage pipe and finished him off in a pretty disgraceful way.

Q12 Chair: I have seen some suggestions that the French secret service was responsible for the intelligence operation that then led to him being identified. Someone has suggested that he was slotted not from close range but from 400 metres with a sniper rifle.

Professor Joffé: The reports at the time were a little more—how can I put this?—close combat design than that. I am not aware that he was actually hit by a sniper.

Alison Pargeter: I have not heard that either.

Chair: Having put that out in the public domain, we will see where that leads.

Q13 Nadhim Zahawi: I want to take you back to resolution 1973. Brazil, China, Germany, India and, as we have already heard, Russia abstained on that resolution. Were there any practical alternatives to the use of military force, in your opinion?

Professor Joffé: To achieve what?

Nadhim Zahawi: To try to at least create a situation where the people of Misrata were not feeling as if they were going to be massacred.

Professor Joffé: I think one needs to be aware that inside Libya at the time the idea of the uniformity of repression is open to challenge. There were always certain towns and certain areas of the country that were very restive indeed under the control of the Gaddafi regime, and on some occasions simply rejected it. At the time, the colonel demonstrated considerable flexibility in adjusting the realities of the Administration to cope with that. There was an occasion, for example, of an attempted coup in 1993 in Bani Walid that failed. The colonel tried to make the tribes from which the ringleaders came responsible for their execution; they simply refused. Five years later, it had to be carried out by the central authorities, thereby alienating that particular group of tribes—some of them very significant—from the regime itself. Misrata had long been antagonistic to the Gaddafi regime, anyway. Beyond that, in Cyrenaica, nearly all the tribes and major cities were antagonistic to the regime. So, in a way, the assumption that a massacre was being planned does not reflect the reality.

Something else that people forget is that Libyans were armed and were capable of self-defence. Indeed, when the revolution began, they demonstrated just how armed they were. Those militias did not come from nowhere. So in a way I think the danger that was

presented to the civilian population was over-exaggerated outside because people were unaware of the situation inside anyway. It is certainly the case that very little consultation took place over what was going on inside Libya over that long period of time from 1984 up until the beginning of this century when we had no diplomatic relations.

Q14 Nadhim Zahawi: Let me push you on that, Professor. Are you saying that, armed with that knowledge, the only other practical alternative would have been to do nothing and let the thing play out?

Professor Joffé: No, I did not say that. First of all, there were sanctions. Secondly, there was diplomatic pressure that could have been applied. It had been applied before: in

1987, for example. So there were other techniques available. But, in the heat of the moment, it seems to me that no one really considered that.

Alison Pargeter: That is my instinct very much: actually nobody really looked for any alternatives. Everything was done in such a rush. There was such a rush to get in there and pass that resolution that nobody looked at any alternatives. Actually, there have been noises coming out of people who were close to the regime since saying, actually, it was looking for a way out in those early days. I do not know whether that is true or not.

But, thinking of maybe some regional kind of solution, brokered by Algeria, trying to think about a solution—what Gaddafi wanted was an honourable exit. He did not want to go, but if he was to go, he needed an honourable exit that would not involve him having to leave Libya and being pushed out of the country and chased by the international community. So if maybe something, some negotiated settlement, could have involved that—it could have involved handing power to his son—maybe that should have been explored. Whether the rebels on the ground in Benghazi would have accepted that, of course, is another matter altogether and my instinct is that they would not have done so. But it strikes me that the effort just was not made at that time.

Q15 Nadhim Zahawi: What was the UK's role in negotiating resolution 1973?

Professor Joffé: I simply do not know what went on inside the Security Council. Can I just bring up one small point that might help to illuminate your question? An article was published in *Vanity Fair*, of all places, by Professor Philippe Sands, that recounted the way in which, right up until the speech that Saif al-Islam made that then condemned him in the eyes of the world, he had believed that he was now in a position, as a result of what had happened in Benghazi, to influence his father to allow for real political reform in Libya.

We do not know quite what happened in the hours preceding the speech, but something did. That article, I think—I think one can rely on the evidence in it—demonstrates quite clearly just how uncertain the situation inside Libya really was. That had been demonstrated before by the crises that had emerged—there were three of them, in fact—inside Cyrenaica. Had those been properly understood, other techniques and other methods of dealing with the situation might have been available.

Q16 Nadhim Zahawi: Let me go back to the NATO intervention, just for clarity for this inquiry. Did that intervention effectively guarantee that the rebels would overthrow the Gaddafi regime?

Professor Joffé: Yes, I think undoubtedly.

Alison Pargeter: It turned the tables completely.

Nadhim Zahawi: There is no doubt in your mind.

Professor Joffé: Simply because it provided the air power that the rebels themselves lacked. Of course, you can see a similar pattern developing inside Syria today.

Q17 Nadhim Zahawi: So without it, he may have survived.

Professor Joffé: Yes, he would have done.

Alison Pargeter: I think he would have survived. I think he would have retaken the east. It would have been very bloody, but I think ultimately he would have survived. His legitimacy would have gone, but he would have survived.

Q18 Nadhim Zahawi: Did NATO act beyond the scope of UN resolution 1973?

Professor Joffé: My impression is that they did not. Not NATO. Individual states, yes.

Q19 Nadhim Zahawi: Can you name those states?

Professor Joffé: I feel I am about to put my head in the lion's mouth, actually. I am afraid I have to say Britain as part of that; France, certainly; Turkey; Qatar; and the United Arab Emirates.

Q20 Nadhim Zahawi: That is a big statement. Are you sure of that?

Professor Joffé: It may be a big statement, but—

Chair: You have the benefit of privilege in making it to a Select Committee.

Professor Joffé: Thank you. I think those are the states that either provided arms or provided personnel or training or intelligence.

Alison Pargeter: And they were crucial. The airstrikes alone I do not think would have been enough to topple Gaddafi. The provision of training, of assistance, turning a blind eye to weapon supplies, wherever they were coming from.

Q21 Nadhim Zahawi: And they were all complicit in acting beyond the scope of the resolution.

Professor Joffé: I think they will be so considered, yes.

Q22 Nadhim Zahawi: My last question is about how NATO airstrikes in Libya were perceived. My colleague, Mr Kawczynski, touched on this in terms of the media, but I want to widen that. How were they perceived in the other Middle Eastern countries, in North African countries? Did they serve as a warning that repression was an unacceptable response to the Arab spring and would result in western military action? What is your view on how they were perceived? Obviously, each country is different and it is a big question.

Professor Joffé: Yes, it is, and you have to make a distinction in responding to it between how Governments may have seen it and how populations did. The Algerian Government was strongly opposed to it, on the grounds, first, of general non-intervention, but also because of its own discomfort because it had been threatened by a civil war some years before. The Moroccan Government was relatively neutral. It did not like Colonel Gaddafi, but none the less it did not really like the idea of intervention either. The Egyptian Government, of course, was in a state of confusion because it was undergoing a profound change. Other

Middle Eastern states, particularly those that were still autocracies, strongly disapproved, yet some of them—Saudi Arabia, for example—would not have disapproved. They profoundly disliked the Gaddafi regime and would be happy to see it go. So at the level of Governments there was a very strong variation. At the level of populations, I do not think so.

Q23 Nadhim Zahawi: You did not mention Qatar.

Professor Joffé: I did not mention Qatar, no. You are quite right. Qatar would have been happy to see Gaddafi go and, indeed, was one of the states that supported action, actively supported it. At the level of populations, outside the Gulf there would have been a very general sentiment of extreme resentment. This came after the intervention in Iraq in 2003; it came also—we tend to forget this—after two centuries of western interference in the Middle East, going back to the Napoleonic invasions of Egypt, and there had grown up a really strong dislike of that. The intervention in Iraq, for example, was compared with the Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258. So there was a very strong sense of dislike for what the West was doing, or was perceived to be doing, even though some Arab states were also involved.

Alison Pargeter: That is why it got tagged, “NATO’s revolution”, rather than the Libyan revolution. Even some of the rebels fighting on the ground in Libya were uncomfortable about the intervention. Ali Sallabi, the Islamist camp, were initially up in arms when there was talk of NATO airstrikes, saying they were going to turn their guns against anybody who entered Libya. That was a pretty widespread feeling.

Professor Joffé: It is also one of the reasons why today virtually no Libyan will accept the idea of any external intervention in the current crisis and chaos.

Q24 Mr Hendrick: Professor Joffé, my colleague Mr Baron made reference to hugs in the desert, obviously referring to Tony Blair and Colonel Gaddafi. He spoke as well about the tremendous benefits, in terms of oil and of the relationship that would develop between the UK and Libya as a result of that. One thing that went overlooked in that little exchange was the fact that he also offered to give up nuclear weapons and suspend his whole programme. As we have seen with Ukraine, the fact that Ukraine promised to give up nuclear weapons has not really protected Ukraine. Similarly, Saddam Hussein promised to give them up and that has not helped him either. So, apart from the lesson that promising to give up nuclear weapons does not necessarily make the world a more peaceful place, it is clear that Britain reneged on what was a good relationship. You said that the offer was superficial, and seen as naive as well as superficial. Do you not think that it would have been a huge gain and that it was not in good character for Britain to indulge in regime change so quickly, particularly given the outcomes we have seen?

Professor Joffé: I am not certain that it is for me to comment on policy decisions by the British Government in that respect. On the question of the abandonment of the nuclear programme—and do not forget that a chemical weapons programme was abandoned as well—it has been argued that, actually, the Libyan nuclear programme was only in its very early stages and that perhaps it was only there to be given up, as a way of placating western sentiment. Colonel Gaddafi’s regime was very profoundly condemned elsewhere in the Arab world for having abandoned something that could have served Arab purposes.

I am not certain that there was so much of a gain in that process, because I am not certain that the nuclear programme, or indeed the chemical weapons programme, was such a threat. It was not of the same order of magnitude as, for example, Iraq's chemical weapons programme had been, or, indeed, as the Syrian chemical weapons programme had been. It was very, very old. So in a way, those things were very easy for Colonel Gaddafi to give up in order to buy western good will as he thought.

Alison Pargeter: I would agree with that.

Q25 Mr Hendrick: Let us look briefly at what happened afterwards. You mentioned the African mercenaries. Those African mercenaries obviously were on the losing side when the airstrikes had taken place and Gaddafi fell. Thousands and thousands of those African mercenaries fled south across the Sahel and took part in the attempted overthrow of the Mali Government, and they are now contributing to a much wider terrorist onslaught in West and Central Africa. Apart from western Governments—Britain and France in particular—not looking at a post-conflict situation in terms of conducting this war against Gaddafi, and apart from the effects in Libya, this has had huge effects on the rest of Africa. What do you think western Governments should do in future, particularly in the light of the decisions we might or might not be taking fairly soon on Syria, before indulging in such interventions?

Alison Pargeter: Maybe not intervene in the first place—that would be my short answer—without thinking things through properly and without understanding what they are getting into.

Professor Joffé: There are two separate issues. The first is whether or not it is a good idea to intervene. The second is what you do after the intervention has taken place. Leaving the first one aside, as far as the second is concerned, it is certainly true that the Governments that had been engaged in the process of regime change did not take responsibility for considering the aftermath. Had they done so, and had they constructed their intervention around the way in which they would handle the aftermath, the outcome might have been rather better than it has been. On a point of information, it is not the Africans who were in Libya who have now fanned out into Nigeria and into Mali.

Q26 Mr Hendrick: Many of them were. We visited—

Professor Joffé: Forgive me; let me just finish. The real group that actually, in a way, promoted what occurred in Mali were the Tuareg. They went there not because they wanted to support extremism but because they wanted to carve out an autonomous region—Azawad—which they did. It was the extremists already in northern Mali who then profited from that, so it is a rather more complicated picture than the one you suggested in your question, and it is quite important to understand that. It is certainly true that the collapse of the Gaddafi regime has created a situation of chaos right the way through the Sahara from Libya to Mali, and that that is very dangerous, but I am not certain it is a question of the numbers involved so much as the lack of any form of state-organised security inside the region as a whole.

Q27 Mr Hendrick: Finally, not intervening would obviously have been one approach, but is there any way in which we could have intervened, foreseen what would or could happen afterwards and then altered policy such that it did not have such dire consequences?

Professor Joffé: I certainly think that what happened afterwards could have been anticipated. It could have been anticipated had there been adequate information available to Government to anticipate it. I am not sure that there actually was or that there was any desire to consider that. There was a strange assumption that somehow democracy would bloom in Libya once the regime had gone and therefore we did not have to bother. That was clearly a mistake.

It is worth noting that the RAND Corporation has carried out a study of the Libyan campaign and wrote a report in 2012 in which they calculated that a stabilisation force only 13,000 strong would have avoided the current situation. I am not competent to judge whether or not that is correct, but the RAND Corporation has a lot of experience in making these sorts of judgment, and it is perhaps a pity that its advice was not listened to.

Alison Pargeter: I agree. It could have been handled much better. Gaddafi's Libya was one of the most personalised, centralised regimes anywhere in the region. What I find extraordinary is the idea that you can go in and take out that central authority and all of the security apparatus around it and leave absolutely nothing in its wake. Libya was a country with no institutions to speak of. When you took Gaddafi away, you took everything away. The idea that you could go and dismantle a regime, and that there would not be fragmentation and chaos—given what we know about the history and complexities of Libya—is extraordinary to me. The idea was that somehow democracy would flourish, the Libyans would get their act together and it would all somehow work itself out.

Q28 Mr Hendrick: You said that and 20:20 vision in hindsight is great. We all have that but what you would have done differently?

Alison Pargeter: I do not know what one could have done differently. Perhaps some kind of stabilisation force would have made a difference. I don't know. There was so much hostility towards any idea of boots on the ground, wherever they came from, that I do not know whether that would have been a success. I do not know how you could have made it more successful, given that you were dismantling an entire personalised, centralised regime.

Q29 Chair: Before turning to the interim Government from 2011 to 2012, you referenced Gaddafi talking about the beards being the target of his policy. How significant was the militant Islamist element of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion and to what extent was al-Qaeda involved?

Alison Pargeter: I think it was very significant right from the beginning. A lot of Islamists—a lot of them militant Islamists who had been part of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group—were fighting on the rebel front lines. Some of these individuals had been released under Saif al-Islam's rather spurious deradicalisation initiative that had been going on for two or three years prior to the uprisings. They had all renounced violence but clearly, when it came to it, they took up arms very quickly. They made up an important faction with the rebel forces in the east and, to a lesser degree, in the west. What is interesting to me is that right from the beginning, those Islamist forces started organising themselves in separate brigades.

They would not fight with some of the other rebel forces to the extent that the head of the NTC, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, had to set up two separate command structures because the Islamists refused to fight under the so-called Libyan rebel army.

Right from the beginning, those Islamists were refusing to be commanded by non-Islamist forces. They separated themselves out. One of the most important incidents of the period was the killing of Abdel Fattah Younes, the head of the rebel army, who was killed by Islamist elements with, so they say, the tacit agreement of the NTC, which shows you the power on the ground that those Islamist elements had right from the beginning. As I said before, after the uprisings, one of the first things Gaddafi did was to release thousands more hard-line Islamist prisoners. These guys were the ones making up a real core of the front lines.

In the west of the country, Belhadj and other LIFG figures were being supported heavily by Qatar, which was channelling its weapons and money to certain groups in Libya with an Islamist agenda. They were there right from the beginning. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group never actually joined al-Qaeda. It was always more nationalistic in orientation. It always kept itself slightly apart but it had a very similar ideological outlook to al-Qaeda. They were there right from the beginning.

Q30 Mike Gapes: May I just follow that up and then go on to the other question? Is it not the fact that there were Libyans who were with bin Laden in Afghanistan?

Alison Pargeter: Yes, they were with him.

Q31 Mike Gapes: So although you said they never joined al-Qaeda, nevertheless there were links.

Alison Pargeter: Absolutely, there were links. They just did not like taking on the al-Qaeda label and they did not necessarily agree with some of its strategies. Libyan Islamists always had a very nationalistic orientation.

Q32 Mike Gapes: So there were connections?

Alison Pargeter: Absolutely, there were connections.

Q33 Mike Gapes: Secondly, may I go back to something that Professor Joffé said? In the last Parliament, we heard evidence from William Hague. We were talking about the Arab spring. He made absolutely clear that his view was that Tony Blair's Government were absolutely right to do the deal with Gaddafi because of the nuclear and chemical weapons that existed. Are you confirming that view that the general view was that this was a good thing to do because of the implications of chemical and nuclear weapons in the hands of a regime such as Gaddafi's?

Professor Joffé: Yes, at the time I think that was true.

Q34 Mike Gapes: I understand Gaddafi changed his position because of the threat that he perceived to be coming from al-Qaeda-like groups. There was a sense that, after 9/11, he would rather be on the side of the West fighting those groups than be on the other side and be a target for those groups. Because of his relations in North Africa and it was so difficult for

his neighbours, and because of the African Union internal problems that he had and his problem with the Arab League, he felt isolated. Is that fair?

Professor Joffé: I don't think so. I think it is a little more complicated than that. It goes further back. The real beginning of the change of heart in Libya occurs in 1987 as a result of the American bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi and of British hostility towards the Gaddafi regime after the events of 1984. It is quite clear that thereafter Gaddafi realised that his attempt to support anti-imperial revolution was not going to succeed, and that all that would happen would be that he would be exposed as a target. The western states were quite prepared to use force against him.

During the 1990s you see a gradual change in the way in which he relates to the West and the way in which he tries to seek a rapprochement. I know you can say—no doubt you will—that the Lockerbie events demonstrate that that was not really correct. I am not sure that is true, because there is still considerable confusion and lack of clarity over what those events really were. Indeed, the regime itself in the end was prepared to correct that mistake, if indeed it was responsible for it, by delivering the two people over to judgment in Holland. So, in a way, there was still a progression taking place towards the West. Certainly after the events of 9/11, Gaddafi then added to that the fact of his own profound distaste and dislike of extremist political Islam, which he saw as a real threat. He was quite consistent thereafter about that.

Q35 Mike Gapes: May I take you to the events of 2011-12 after the overthrow of Gaddafi? You have already touched on this, but why did the National Transitional Council—the interim Government—fail? Why was it so difficult for it to establish a transition to an elected democracy?

Professor Joffé: I am not sure that it was such a failure. It did not achieve everything that was intended, but it did manage the process of an election and a transition.

Q36 Mike Gapes: So you think that on balance it was a success?

Professor Joffé: On balance, I think it discharged more or less what it intended to do and what it had been created to do.

Q37 Mike Gapes: Given the divisions that you have talked about—the East and the West, and the history of the country not really being a functioning country in the sense of having institutions because it was a personal regime—did it not have an almost impossible task to bring about change?

Professor Joffé: It had a very difficult task, but it did carry out successful elections, which produced a unitary Government that was generally accepted to have been elected by a democratic process.

Q38 Mike Gapes: So in that sense you could say that the intervention was a success because it brought about a Libyan process to establish democratic institutions.

Professor Joffé: I am afraid I do not see the connection.

Q39 Mike Gapes: You are in a position where there is an intervention that leads to the removal of a brutal, repressive regime, and then a Libyan transition is established, and you have said that it successfully produced a democratic process.

Professor Joffé: Yes, but that is to assume that there was a project from the very beginning to achieve that outcome. What I would suggest to you is that there were a series of different stages and a process evolved that, after the removal of the Gaddafi regime, created a space in which that experiment could be tried, and the National Transitional Council did manage to conduct affairs during that interim period well enough for there to be an election process, but that came after the end of the regime. It was changed circumstances.

Q40 Mike Gapes: All right. So in 2012, at the end of the process, were we far too optimistic? Were the UK, France, the Americans—leading from behind—all over optimistic about the outcome of that process and that transition?

Professor Joffé: Quite clearly. It was evident at the time that there was no central authority that could control the security situation.

Alison Pargeter: That was the problem.

Professor Joffé: That was the whole problem.

Alison Pargeter: The NCT never actually managed to have power on the ground. It might have managed a process, but in terms of having control on the ground, getting control of those militias and reining them in, it was never able to do that. In terms of the 2012 elections, for me that whole process was rushed absolutely ridiculously quickly.

Q41 Mike Gapes: So did it need outside forces from other countries on the ground to assist it in that process?

Alison Pargeter: It would have created even more chaos and havoc and would not have been the solution.

Q42 Mike Gapes: How were they going to get the stability otherwise?

Alison Pargeter: Exactly. The whole country had fragmented. That is the problem of Libya today. It is fragmented. Because of the way that the revolution unfolded—it was militia by militia, town after town rising up and separate militias—the whole country absolutely fragmented. The whole of the central authority was shattered, so how were you ever going to get it back?

Q43 Mike Gapes: So a NATO stabilisation force in there to assist that process would not have been a thing to do?

Alison Pargeter: It may have helped, but given the way that Libyans tend to view outsiders and the way that Libyans view the idea of their sovereignty being transgressed, I think that it would have ended up causing more chaos, more conflict and more antagonism.

Q44 Mike Gapes: A final question from me: was there any desire among NATO countries to do such a thing, or was there a reluctance, both because of the terms of UN resolution 1973 and also domestic political opposition to intervention and troops in the ground?

Alison Pargeter: I think the idea was as light of foot as possible.

Professor Joffé: I don't think that there was any desire among NATO countries, and of course it was forbidden under the resolution for there to be any direct intervention on the ground, but there is something else. Even if you couldn't intervene directly on the ground, it might have been possible to make a much more concerted effort to help the process of democratic transition, and that didn't occur. There was help, but it was nowhere near sufficient or intensive enough for it to achieve the outcomes that were desired.

Alison Pargeter: As I said before, it was all done so quickly. The Libyans themselves were complaining, "Why have elections been foisted on us?" This is a country with no political culture, no experience of politics, not even any experience of civil society or any kind of political activism. Elections happened very quickly. I think that political parties had about 18 days to campaign, in a society totally unfamiliar with that political system. It was a joke.

Q45 Stephen Gethins: This is a very fortuitous time to come in on the point that you raised, Professor, and that you picked up on, Ms Pargeter. Information that was released from the House of Commons Library over the summer showed that we—the UK—spent about £320 million on the bombing campaign and we have spent about £25 million on reconstruction efforts since. That is about 13 to one. Could more of an investment have made a difference? I know that you mentioned that in your last comment.

Professor Joffé: It can only be purely speculative, because we just don't know, but it does seem to me that had there been much greater investment, either directly on a national basis or through the United Nations and helping the United Nations process, you might have got a much better outcome. In the end, all of it proves that, when confronted with a security situation, the greatest problem was the fact that nobody thought about reconstituting an effective army that could control the militias. The militias have proved to be the most disintegrating factor inside Libya since 2011.

Let me just go back to the question of institutions. There was of course a bureaucracy in Libya that served the state, but the point is that the state was highly personalised. All political decisions were made in a very small coterie of people around Colonel Gaddafi himself. The bureaucracy was there to serve him, so the moment you remove him, bureaucracy dissolves. There was no attempt made to reconstruct an effective bureaucracy to be able to administer the country. The only reason today, for example, why Libya still survives at all is that there are two institutions that have managed to avoid being split—the Central Bank of Libya and the Libyan national oil company, and the electricity company, too. They are the only elements that keep Libya operating. I think that indicates the enormous failure of not being able to provide that infrastructure to allow a state to continue to operate.

Alison Pargeter: When you talk about more investment, the problem everybody had was, who do you engage with when you want to deliver aid or reconstruction efforts? There

was never any authority you could actually engage with. In terms of the security field, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defence were largely in the hands of militias.

The head of the armed forces, Youssef al-Mangoush, did not want to create armed forces; he favoured channelling money to the Libya Shields, to some of the brigades, and so did his successor Al-Abedi. You did not even have a head of an armed forces who was interested in creating armed forces. The idea that you keep throwing money at the absolute mess is inconceivable.

Q46 Stephen Gethins: The picture that you have both clearly painted is quite chaotic. Are you aware of, or can you comment on, the level of post-conflict reconstruction planning that took place before the intervention? Was there anything that you are aware of?

Professor Joffé: I am not aware of a single bit of planning for that.

Q47 Stephen Gethins: You are not aware of a single bit of post-conflict reconstruction planning.

Professor Joffé: No. It was made up on the hoof, as events unfolded.

Alison Pargeter: I have seen lots of wonderful, laudable plans, but putting them into action has not happened.

Q48 Stephen Gethins: Your comments have been very helpful. Just drawing on them, I'd like to finish my line of questioning with something you have commented on a little already. What lessons would you take for any future interventions in terms of long-term commitment?

Professor Joffé: Be careful what you wish for, to be frank. Realise that, if you are going to intervene—and I recognise that almost certainly this country and others will intervene again—you had better think about the consequences of what you do, and you had better plan for it.

Alison Pargeter: You can't knock out a centralised power. Look at what happened in Iraq and Libya.

Q49 Mr Baron: Your comments and answers to Stephen Gethins are interesting, in that they reinforce the view among many that this was more about regime change than anything else. If you are not planning for a reconstruction or can't produce any evidence of planning, it does smack that you are going in there with a particular motive.

May I quiz you a little bit more on the balance between lack of knowledge on the ground and ulterior motives? I think it is generally accepted—I would appreciate your view—that we simply did not understand, or anyway had very little idea of, what was happening on the ground. For example, I remember the Foreign Office view after the elections in 2011-12 that a large a number of independents over Islamists being elected was a good thing, not recognising the fact that those independents had quite a close link with extremists in many cases. We just did not understand that. Initially, we took that as a positive, but actually it was a negative. It was that sort of lack of knowledge.

What was it? Was it just simply a lack of knowledge on the ground of what was happening, understanding the forces at play, that meant that there was a lack of reconstruction planning and commitment? Or was it that it was very simple, that it wasn't about Benghazi—it was about regime change—and therefore you really didn't mind, once you had knocked down the door, what happened afterwards?

Professor Joffé: I am not quite sure how to respond to that, partly because I think you are right that it was about regime change, with very little thought about the aftermath. But that raises another problem. Why is it that when, for example, we fought the second world war there was a very detailed series of plans about what to do about Germany after that war, and how to help the process of reconstructing the German state?

Why was it that when we came to Iraq—not so much a question for Britain but the United States—the plans that were developed were simply abandoned and alternative plans put into place that bore no relation to the situation on the ground and were founded on a profound lack of knowledge and an enormous belief that “democracy” would simply “flourish”? I quote Paul Wolfowitz. Why is it that in the wake of all the colour revolutions that occurred in the previous decade and the evidence of how quickly they went wrong, even in countries that had democratic traditions in the past, we did not learn that if you want democracy to flourish there are institutions you must build before it can occur? Democracy is a habit, not just a process of elections. Why is it that we were incapable of learning from the experience of Afghanistan and Iraq? To that I have no real answer, except that it seems to me that Governments generally—this is a general criticism of Governments throughout the Western world—tend to have very short purviews. They serve for five years, and then there is an election. Therefore, we very rarely undertake the process of thinking through how to achieve a stable, reliable democratic system.

Let me add one other thing. Speaking from an academic background, I have the strong impression that very little attention is paid to academics who study these sorts of subjects. I remember being staggered at the lack of knowledge that existed inside Government over the question of Iraq. There was no willingness to engage with a body of information that had been built up, which you may greatly distrust because it is purely academic—ivory tower, and so forth—but none the less has something to say about the way democracy is established and operates.

Q50 Mr Baron: Can I come back to you? This is obviously very pertinent to a discussion we are having about Syria. Sticking with Libya, is it also a fact that there has been a lack of investment in our foreign policy apparatus, in the sense that we simply do not know what is happening on the ground? There have been continual cuts by Governments of both persuasions—the hollowing out of the library and the closing of the language school. The Camel Corps is long gone. During the Arab spring, we had to call back Arabists. On Crimea, we had no Ukraine experts in situ. How much does that contribute to the problem?

Professor Joffé: I think that if you want to understand that particular problem, you need to go further back, ironically enough, to the Thatcher Government and the way in which the relationship between Downing Street and the Foreign Office changed at that time. That marked the beginning of a decay of the role of the Foreign Office as a key element in the construction of policy in this country. But all the other factors you mentioned, of course, are true. If you diminish the expertise, you inevitably end up being worse informed, and if you

are worse informed, you will design policies that are far less effective. That is certainly what has occurred.

There is also the problem that the idea of effective policy has become increasingly alien to Government, in terms of foreign policy. Domestic policy is another matter. That perhaps represents a trend throughout the whole of Europe and the United States that has been taking place over a very long period. In a way, yes, that is the root of the problem, and I don't see any way it can be countered. Although you wanted to exclude Syria, let me just point out that the current crisis in the way we are managing the situation in Syria could have been foretold four years ago. The policies that were adopted were guaranteed to fail, as indeed they have.

Chair: Let us now turn to UN and UK support for Libyan reconstruction.

Q51 Ann Clwyd: May I ask you to give some assessment of how effective or ineffective was the UN support given to Libya at the time?

Professor Joffé: It depends who you listen to. If you listen to Mr Bernardino León, he will tell you—in fact, he did tell us—that the general plan has been accepted by both sides, and we can look forward to a third Government in Libya that will eventually be accepted as the new Government. That is a question of whether you think creating institutions or creating the people who are going to populate the new Government is the most important consideration.

At the moment, the general view seems to be that Libyans are coming round to the idea that they have got to create viable institutions, and the people who are going to operate them is a secondary matter. We see, for example, in Tripoli a general acceptance by moderates and moderate Islamists of the idea of there being a new Government—a Government of national salvation. There also is a general acceptance of the principles in Tobruk. The problems reside over who it is who should then populate that new Government. That looks as if it will be something to be further discussed, even though the House of Representatives will run out of legitimacy on 20 October, despite its decision to prolong its own life. That is exactly what the people at the National General Congress did.

In a way, it is still not clear how successful the UN has been. It is also the case that it has received far too little support for it truly to achieve the objectives that were originally set for it. That is partly because there have also been a lot of national initiatives in the past that have confused and made its task much more difficult.

Q52 Ann Clwyd: Do you think the European Union might have been more effective in any way?

Professor Joffé: I don't think the European Union would have been more effective than the United Nations, but the European Union could have certainly played a part. I am afraid that, in recent years, the EU has been far too obsessed about its internal crises to be able to play a very effective part in any of these transitions.

Q53 Ann Clwyd: But given the situation on the ground, could any of these projects have been successful?

Professor Joffé: Looking at it from today's perspective, no. But there were times when they could have been. There was that window between October 2011 and June 2012 when it was possible to consider that there could have been a process by which you could begin to consolidate power and consolidate security, and you might then have been able to begin to build institutions. By now, however, it has become extremely difficult.

Alison Pargeter: I am very pessimistic about that. In terms of the UNSMIL peace process, there may be elements on both sides that are accepting of what George was talking about, but actually the real players on the ground are still rejecting it out of hand.

Professor Joffé: That is true.

Alison Pargeter: The other thing is that none of the processes seem to have bought into the fact that Libya's biggest tribes are still entirely outside of this process, including the UNSMIL process—the Warfalla, the Magariha and the Qadhadhfa. Those tribes that were associated with the former regime and who felt that they had been scapegoated by the revolution, have stayed on the side-lines of the whole process. They represent up to 2 million Libyans, but there has been no real attempt to try to bring those tribes in to the process, and for me that national reconciliation process and bringing those elements in is crucial to Libya ever getting back on its feet. Those tribes are completely outside of the UNSMIL process, and that is a serious problem.

Q54 Ann Clwyd: Whose fault is it then that those attempts have not been made? Where do you put the blame?

Alison Pargeter: A lack of foresight on the part of UNSMIL; an unwillingness on the part of those tribes to want to be involved, because they still feel that they are being scapegoated by the powers that be in Libya—it is such a complex situation.

Professor Joffé: I think one can say that, at every stage where a choice can be made between one policy and another, the wrong policy has been chosen, so you have error compounding upon error to create a situation that today will be very difficult to solve. The only thing that offers some hope are two or three small indicators. Number one: there has been a call for the national dialogue group to reassert itself. That rests on the Tunisian experience, although the institutions that operate in Tunisia do not exist in Libya. Secondly, there is a constitution draft in being, which gives some indication of something around which people could consolidate, although whether they will or not, we do not know. Thirdly, there is a general feeling that perhaps institutions need to be built, but again, as Alison has pointed out, until that in some way can be translated into a reality, it will be very difficult to see any way forward. You must remember that a large number of people have a vested interest in the current situation.

Do not forget that the migration crisis is not outside this, because some of the militias have now been criminalised sufficiently to be engaged in its operation. That represents yet another problem, because they now have a real interest in maintaining a status quo, and they are all located in Tripolitania, the sea-based cities.

Alison Pargeter: There are also important figures like General Haftar, who knows that any peace process means the end of him. He is not going to give up. He is the most powerful force.

Q55 Ann Clwyd: The UK implemented a number of support projects. Did those fail?

Professor Joffé: I think they have all stopped, haven't they?

Alison Pargeter: There were attempts to train up soldiers with the idea that they would go back and be reintegrated into the armed forces, but reintegrated into what? There is no state, no proper armed forces.

Professor Joffé: The danger with General Haftar, by the way, is that, should there be a general decision about removing power from the two existing Governments, he is quite likely to decide that he will therefore take over power, and he does have the military force to do that, certainly in the east.

Alison Pargeter: There has been talk about setting up a military committee that he will head and declare a state of emergency. He is waiting in the wings with that in mind.

Q56 Ann Clwyd: Would you say that the Libyan people are better or worse off than they were under Gaddafi?

Alison Pargeter: I would say undoubtedly worse off.

Professor Joffé: I think they are worse off, I really do.

Alison Pargeter: There was that awful fear that you felt in Libya before—that terrible oppressive fear—but as long as you kept your head down, you were okay. Now the insecurity is pervasive. There are so many stories of kidnaps and detentions. I know many people personally whose family members have disappeared, and that is a common story for many Libyans.

There are problems with electricity supplies, fuel, goods. Prices are rising. People are scrabbling to survive. Salaries are not being paid. The whole country has pretty much ground to a halt. The administration has ground to a halt because you have these two competing authorities. Life is horrendous. I do not think people would hark back to Gaddafi yet, but there is a sense that life was far better before and was secure.

Chair: Andrew Rosindell, on the unbridled success of our policy.

Q57 Andrew Rosindell: Having visited Libya with the Foreign Affairs Committee in the previous Parliament, I'm afraid everything you have said today is profoundly depressing. It makes me deeply concerned about how Britain has played a part in what has clearly been a monumental failure of foreign policy.

To come back on what you were saying, we can all gather where your views are on this and how you feel, but did you feel the same in September 2011 when Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron were standing in Tripoli almost like great victors having saved the country from Gaddafi and being cheered by the crowds? At that point, would you have

predicted that you would be saying what you have said today, or did you think, as many of us did, that we went in there for the right reasons to rescue that country?

Professor Joffé: I can assure you, I never thought we went in for the right reasons. I may not have predicted the utter chaos that exists today, but I certainly did not view their arrival in Libya in Green Square, as it used to be called—Martyrs’ Square as it is today—with any enthusiasm at all.

Q58 Andrew Rosindell: You say we did not go in for the right reasons. Many of us supported the action in Libya because we felt that Gaddafi was bad and needed to go and we were rescuing the people on humanitarian grounds, but you say we did not go in for those reasons at all. So what were the reasons that we do not know about?

Professor Joffé: I can only speculate on why we did what we did. I suppose it is not so much the reasons that concern me, but the lack of foresight of the consequences. It was a question perhaps that here was an opportunity to be in step with what appeared to be taking place inside the Middle East—the radical changes that were seen to be occurring, the democratisation, the destruction of autocracies; exactly the sort of atmosphere that existed just after the end of the Cold War. That does not seem to me to be a basis on which you can make adequate policy, so I was always very distrustful of the outcome and the consequences of those policies.

Alison Pargeter: Back to your original question, I felt a sense of happiness to think that that regime had gone. I found it very moving, but at the same time I was deeply troubled and concerned because all of the issues that have arisen since were clear from that point: the regional issues, the tribal issues, the way the revolution had unfolded with the different militias.

Q59 Andrew Rosindell: Do you think David Cameron thought about that as well at the time?

Alison Pargeter: I have no idea.

Q60 Andrew Rosindell: Was he swept along?

Alison Pargeter: My feeling was that he was swept along. There were comments by William Hague after the first elections in 2012, lauding them, as if that was it and we had achieved success—there was democracy in Libya in action. Well, democracy requires a bit more than an election.

Q61 Andrew Rosindell: So the box was ticked and everyone moved on.

Alison Pargeter: Yes.

Q62 Andrew Rosindell: Okay. I will move on to another question, just briefly. What effect has the deteriorating security situation in Libya since 2011 had on neighbouring countries—the ripple effect?

Alison Pargeter: It’s disastrous.

Professor Joffé: Absolutely disastrous.

Q63 Andrew Rosindell: Tell us a bit about how the countries close by have been affected.

Alison Pargeter: Tunisia has been affected very badly. There have been streams of Libyans coming in; there are a lot of social tensions down in the south of Tunisia at the moment because of the influx of Libyans. More important is the movement of militants and weapons—the borders are pretty porous. It is the same for Algeria. It has been a disaster. It is the same for Egypt as well.

Professor Joffé: I'm afraid that is true. Don't forget that the attacks on the Tigtourine gas facility in January 2013 originated in Libya: the group that was responsible trained there, was armed there and moved in from there. That could not have occurred had there not already been chaos in southern Libya, which, by the way, continues today. Think how the smuggling networks across the Sahara have been able to amplify and extend their operations; they are linked into smuggling networks coming from Latin America, as well as from Africa south of the Sahara. You have a real combination of sources of instability, and you have effectively given free range to extremist groups throughout the whole Sahara and down into West Africa. That really is an extremely serious situation, and it comes directly from the collapse of the Libyan state. It was all foreseeable—that is the terrible point. It really could have been foreseen.

Q64 Chair: Perhaps what could have been foreseen was the—

Professor Joffé: How could it have been foreseen?

Chair: No, sorry, I am leading on to a different subject: the effect of the events in Egypt on the failure of the transition between the General National Congress and the House of Representatives. To what extent was the refusal by the Islamist majority in the General National Congress to cede power to the House of Representatives driven by what happened in Egypt and the treatment of the Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood Government? Did that lead to their refusing to hand over authority to the House of Representatives?

Alison Pargeter: I don't think it made a huge difference. The collapse of the Brotherhood in Egypt made a difference to the Brotherhood inside Libya. They were certainly very concerned: the bulwark of their support had always come from the Egyptian Brotherhood, going back over many decades. But that refusal to cede power was part of an ongoing struggle that predated what happened in Egypt. This was a struggle being fought out in that Congress between Islamist elements and more liberal elements. When the elections came in 2014, there was no way that the Islamists were going to cede power. I really think that what happened in Egypt was neither here nor there.

Q65 Chair: We were then left with two administrations in Tripoli and Tobruk. Did either of them manage to deliver basic governmental services?

Professor Joffé: No, neither did. If I may go back to your previous question, one needs to remember that in the original elections in 2012, one of the striking features was the way in which, unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, the Islamists did not receive what they regarded as a fair share of the vote. They expected to be in the same situation as Ennahda in Tunisia

and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; it didn't work out like that, even if large numbers of independents were prepared to be sympathetic towards them. In a sense, they felt cheated, and they felt cheated again in 2014, so, quite apart from anything else, they were never going to accept that result—indeed, they didn't.

Q66 Chair: Was there any justification for their feeling cheated?

Professor Joffé: No, there wasn't.

Q67 Chair: Do they represent what is clearly a minority view in Libya?

Professor Joffé: Activist political Islam did represent a minority view; Islam itself did not.

Alison Pargeter: I think it also reflects the fact that in Libya there is deep suspicion of political parties and organised groups, which is in part a hangover from the Gaddafi era. We saw that in the elections of 2012, in which 80 seats out of 200 were reserved for political parties. By the time we got to the election law of 2014, all 200 seats were reserved for independents. Political parties were not even allowed to contest them; they were not even allowed to contest the elections to the constitution-drafting assembly. A lot of that suspicion for the Brotherhood is a suspicion about political parties. When you talk to members of the Libyan Brotherhood, they say, "Libyans don't want to vote for us as a party but they like us as individuals. They will vote for us as individuals."

Q68 Chair: But they then didn't get elected.

Alison Pargeter: They didn't get elected.

Q69 Chair: But they tried.

Alison Pargeter: Yes. They were never really able to establish themselves.

Professor Joffé: You need to remember that in Libya, because of the lack of any democratic experience, it was individuals who attracted support. The elections of all independents were statements about the individual reputation of those elected. That did not necessarily mean that they would be expressed Islamists. They would be local notables—people with a local reputation—who, for some reason, could therefore guarantee clientage that would give them the electoral position they wanted.

Q70 Chair: Going back to practical administration—reflecting on the fact that the Islamists made progress in Turkey by offering to collect the rubbish in Istanbul some time ago—what has actually hindered the delivery of basic services in Tripoli and Tobruk? Would you identify any factors that have made it impossible for administration to happen?

Professor Joffé: There has been a lack of a local administration too, although one has to be careful because, in some places, that has been able to reconstitute itself. Some cities are rather better organised than others. Under the Gaddafi regime, those functions were carried out by a series of popular committees that were dominated by the revolutionary committee movement. They had a certain need to demonstrate that they could manage the process of administration. With the revolution, they all disappeared. They were replaced by local

militias that had very different agendas in mind. There was not necessarily going to be an effective administration that could carry out those very mundane functions. Only in places where there have been elections since and where effective councils have been appointed have those functions been undertaken. That has been a very general problem, by the way. It also occurred in Tunisia after the revolution there. That is the basic problem—there just is not the administrative infrastructure necessary to make that work.

Alison Pargeter: There is also the issue of mobilising resources. Libya has had an absolute crisis in its energy sector for the past year or a year and a half. It has got really bad; output has dropped right down, so they have not had the resources to be able to deliver anything very much, other than the fact that they have been caught up in their own squabbles and zero-sum type politics. No-one has been able to address the daily needs of Libya, they have been so caught up in their own power struggles.

Chair: Mark Hendrick, moving on to the ongoing conflict.

Q71 Mr Hendrick: Regional powers have reportedly backed both secularist and Islamist militias in Libya with military support, including airstrikes. What weight do you attach to those reports about regional powers influencing Libya?

Professor Joffé: You are thinking particularly of Egypt, Qatar and Turkey?

Q72 Mr Hendrick: Yes, in terms of support particularly for General Haftar.

Professor Joffé: And there you are thinking primarily of Egypt. Yes, there are agreements between General Haftar and the Egyptian Government over what must be done, partly because the Egyptian Government are worried about the consequences of the chaos in Libya and that spilling over the Egyptian borders. The recent killing of the Mexican tourists in the Western desert was partly a consequence of the intensified security that has been put in place for that reason.

One can understand the Egyptian concern. The Egyptians do not want to intervene directly. They have made that very clear. They will intervene only if they feel threatened. The air attacks that they have been involved in have been in response to that—in fact, the first air attack occurred in response to the killing of 21 Copts close to Sirte. Otherwise, I am afraid that in terms of actually altering the situation on the ground, I do not think that external interventions by those countries has done anything except to solidify the divisions that exist. The Islamists have received support from Turkey and Qatar. The secularists have received support from the UAE and Egypt. All it has done is ensure that neither side can win.

Alison Pargeter: A side might believe they can win, not that it has been a deterrent to signing up to the peace process. All the time that Haftar believes that he can still get support and weapons for Egypt, why not carry on?

Q73 Mr Hendrick: So you are saying that, one way or another, Haftar is going to carry on these—

Alison Pargeter: Haftar will carry on. He has made it very clear that he is opposed to the whole of the UN process.

Q74 Mr Hendrick: So a peace process is a waste of time?

Alison Pargeter: It's a waste of time.

Q75 Mr Hendrick: Which means that both of them will carry on. Do you think there is a danger that this could spill out into some sort of wider regional conflict, because of the involvement of—typically—Egypt and the UAE?

Professor Joffé: Well, the wider regional conflict really depends on the chaos inside Libya, and I think the countries concerned are well enough aware of the dangers of direct intervention that they will try to minimise that possibility. Turkey is not going to send troops into Libya.

Q76 Mr Hendrick: It's got enough on its plate with Syria, hasn't it?

Professor Joffé: Yes, and it isn't doing that much in Syria either; its main concern is with the Kurds.

I think that the UAE is fully stretched in Yemen at the moment and doesn't want to become militarily engaged. Egypt has made it clear that it's concerned only if it feels threatened itself, and will then take action. Algeria won't take action. The Algerian army is constitutionally forbidden to operate outside its borders—not that that would necessarily restrain it, but it certainly uses that as an excuse for not engaging. Tunisia's not in a situation to engage either. So it's difficult to see how any external power has got the resources to intervene really effectively inside Libya.

Q77 Mr Hendrick: So, from the sound of it then, it is not an immediate danger to any other countries in the region, but it is obviously going to continue in a way that it is fuelled externally, with weapons and support from other regimes.

Professor Joffé: Well, it's a vacuum, and so it attracts people who wish to exploit the potential of a vacuum. And given the enormous abundance of weapons there—by the way, those weapons filter out all round the region, even appearing in Syria—it represents a constant danger. And if you don't have a space that's managed, particularly given the size of Libya and its location, it's bound to be a very disturbing and threatening situation for surrounding states.

By the way, surrounding states include the European Union, and it seems to me that the European Union is caught in a quandary. It was authorised—yesterday, I think—for one year by the UN Security Council to intervene against migrant boats on the high seas, but the real problem lies in Libyan territorial waters and it can't operate there.

Q78 Mike Gapes: Can I ask you about Daesh-ISIL? How significant is it within Libya, and is it a new phenomenon or just a rebadging or rebranding of organisations that were already there?

Alison Pargeter: I think it is significant, but I also think it is rather overplayed and exaggerated in the media. Daesh are there, but they are not there massively; it is not like in Iraq or in Syria. For me, quite a bit of it is a rebranding of people who were part of Ansar al-Sharia, who sort of switched sides to the ISIL brand, if you like. But really they are strong in and around Sirte; that is their main area of operations. They are operating in a few other places, but what seems to be happening now is that every time we have a sort of militant Islamist cell, it gets flagged up as Daesh or ISIS, which of course suits the likes of Haftar and the whole of the Tobruk camp. So it's there; it's a problem. Certainly, in Sirte, it still seems to have a certain degree of tribal cover locally.

Q79 Mike Gapes: Is it because they think they can get funding from the well-armed, well-funded organisation that is in Iraq and Syria, or is there some ideological reason that people would wish to be associated with that organisation?

Alison Pargeter: I think it's ideological. It's kudos; this is a group to be reckoned with at last.

Q80 Mike Gapes: So it's similar to Boko Haram in Nigeria, then, in the sense that you become part of a global brand, rather than being just regional or local?

Alison Pargeter: That's my feeling, yes.

Professor Joffé: Can I take you back a little way? If you think about it, the actions in the Algerian civil war carried out by the GIA are exactly the same as the actions carried out by Daesh, whether in Syria, in Iraq or indeed in Libya. In fact, local groups have got the potential and have long had the potential to behave in a very similar way. So, to a large extent, what you're seeing is a rebranding process. But one needs to be careful, because there is a significant hard core of people who have come in from Syria specifically to try to create a nucleus for the development and expansion of Daesh inside Libya itself and then inside the wider region. But, again, they are weak. Do not forget that they began in Derna, in eastern Libya, and they were defeated there and forced out by a local extremist group that disliked their behaviour. They moved down to Sirte, and you might ask the question: why Sirte, which had been the heartland of the Gaddafi regime? One of the characteristics of Daesh is that it makes local alliances. It did so inside Iraq, which is one of the reasons why it was so successful there so quickly. It makes local alliances with people who feel in some way alienated from the regime in power. In the case of Iraq, it was, of course, the former Ba'ath party. In the case of Libya, initially it was also elements of the Qadhadhfa, who felt profoundly disaffected from what had occurred inside Libya. They managed to destroy that relationship by very violently suppressing demonstrations in favour of Saif al-Islam when he was sentenced to death. The result has been that they have now regrouped outside Sirte and in parts of the town itself to reconstitute themselves as a new nucleus. But they still have not been able to expand.

I agree with Alison that we tend to over-exaggerate the significance of Daesh at present. Whether it grows further will depend on the extent to which other groups such as Ansar al-Sharia are prepared to associate themselves with Daesh. There is another location, too: Sabratha, close to the Tunisian border, but whether that really is Daesh or not, nobody knows.

Q81 Mike Gapes: Are they actually administering anywhere where they are providing employment or energy?

Professor Joffé: No, not in Libya.

Alison Pargeter: They are not that strong. Even in Sirte, which they control, they are not that strong. They are not the only force there. They are running extortion rackets and they are taking money from local factories and businesses, but they are nowhere near as developed as you would find in Iraq.

Q82 Mike Gapes: A final question on this: if they are, as an organisation, reduced or pushed out of Iraq and Syria, is it likely that they would come into Libya in big numbers because it would provide them with a comfortable environment to operate in?

Professor Joffé: I don't think so—not as they are currently constituted inside Libya.

Q83 Ann Clwyd: If there were a Government of national accord, what would its main challenges be?

Alison Pargeter: First of all, it has got to find somewhere to locate itself. That is problematic, for a start. I have heard all sorts of talk about possibly creating a green zone in Tripoli, but that has not gone down very well inside Tripoli. Moving beyond stalemate, it is going to be made up of two competing forces. Both Deputy Prime Ministers will have the power to veto any decision made by the Government, so that is likely to be problematic. More fundamentally, how these two sides are going to come together and govern, and put their differences aside, I cannot see. There are all the other problems of mobilising resources, and the fact that the powers on the ground are going to act as spoilers at every possible opportunity.

We have not even started with the problems. It has been difficult enough getting to this point. If we do actually get to the Government, all the serious problems will really start, including all the security provisions that arise out of the political agreement that they want to sign as part of the UNSMIL package. How are you going to deal with Haftar? How are you going to deal with all the brigades? The challenges are phenomenal.

Professor Joffé: I have to agree with that. It seems to me that you may well be able to constitute a new institution, and you may even be able to populate it, but until it controls security, it is an irrelevance. How it is going to control security, I really cannot see, partly because of the resistance of General Khalifa Haftar, and also simply because of the existing militias. They are still there. They still have their own dual organisations. They are still extremely resistant to any question of external control. Until that is solved, I do not see any way in which you can create a viable governmental solution to the crisis in Libya.

Q84 Daniel Kawczynski: Very quickly, contacts of mine in Libya say that a Government of national unity is not realistic and is not something that they want, whereas our own perception is that we have to give the UN as much leeway and support as possible in trying to bring the two factions together to form a Government of national unity. What are your thoughts on those differences of opinion?

Professor Joffé: It seems to me that if you consider that Libya should continue as a state, it requires a unitary Government of some kind. Whether that Government should be reconstituted as a federal Government—that would imply that you give authority to the three regions that make up Libya—or whether it should be simply unitary, as it used to be, is a matter that, no doubt, needs to be discussed. There is a geographical problem that people tend to overlook. Libya is constituted, in effect, of two concentrations of population almost 1,000 miles apart. You have Tripoli and Benghazi and around them you have a series of satellite towns. How you bring those two elements together in a territorial display that allows you to operate a unitary Government now, particularly as Cyrenaica increasingly does not want to be part of the wider picture of a unified Libyan state, seems to me to be a problem that has not yet been confronted.

Q85 Chair: On that happy note, what options are there for the international community, since you think we are heading up a blind alley with the current discussions?

Professor Joffé: I am not sure that it is a blind alley; I am just saying that it is going to require much more time and much more careful forethought than was, perhaps, anticipated. We cannot cobble together a solution. Maybe we have to wait and bring Libyans into the process, too. Maybe the constitution will be a way. Maybe the idea of a national dialogue will be another way of trying to reconcile differing points of view. We have to remember that there are elements there that do not want to be reconciled and that is going to represent a major problem. There has not been any real discussion about the best form of reconstructing the Libyan state. Should it be federal; should it be unitary? We have all made the assumption that it will be unitary, and I am not certain that that is correct.

Alison Pargeter: I assume that many such discussions are going on inside Libya and the Constituent Assembly.

Professor Joffé: Yes, they are.

Alison Pargeter: That is one of the key sticking points in getting a new constitution together. These hugely explosive and sensitive issues will take a long time to resolve.

Q86 Chair: So what are the options for the international community?

Professor Joffé: I think, to engage much more with those other elements, outside the two Governments that currently exist, that are trying to construct some kind of viable solution for Libya. That is, the constitutional committee, which still exists and has just produced a draft constitution in Arabic, and elements such as the national dialogue initiative. Indeed, I am afraid you have to bring together all the elements in Libya, so that they can all feel that they have some stake in a successful outcome. I am not sure that that has yet been done.

Alison Pargeter: As I said earlier, I think it is really important to bring in the main tribes that are still outside this process. They might actually be able to tip one way or the other. That might be helpful. I agree with George; the people who really matter are not party to this process. How you convince the people on the ground to become party to it, I do not know, but it is not going to be resolved until that is tackled.

Chair: On behalf of my colleagues, I thank you both very much for your time. You have both been compelling and excellent witnesses, and I am extremely grateful that you have given us the benefit of your views and answered questions so clearly on what is an extremely difficult issue.