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UNLIKE IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN, THE U.S. APPEARS TO BE TAKING A HANDS-OFF APPROACH TO LIBYA

PAUL SHUGAR[†]

Since a 27-year-old Muammar Qaddafi seized control in 1969, Libya has known no other leader.¹ While his relationship with the United States could best be described as neutral in the 1970s, it soured in the 1980s when terrorist attacks in Europe were linked to the dictator.² After U.S. President Ronald Reagan deemed Qaddafi “the mad dog of the Middle East,” U.S. warplanes struck Benghazi and Tripoli in 1986.³ Further Qaddafi-sponsored terrorist acts led to Great Britain and France joining the U.S. in imposing United Nations sanctions on Libya.⁴ The U.S.-Libya relationship remained tense until 2003, when Libya renounced its weapons of mass destruction program after the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁵ The two countries rekindled diplomatic relations in 2006,⁶ but that relationship ended when the U.S. joined the NATO-led operation to overthrow Qaddafi in March of 2011.⁷ Now, the U.S. is left to forge a new relationship with Libya after Qaddafi’s death.

While the U.S. congratulated Libya on its freedom, the U.S. has not clearly defined what its role will be in rebuilding the war-torn country.⁸ After watching Iraq spiral out of control following the ouster of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. appears more than willing to take a back seat to NATO.⁹ Billions of U.S. dollars have been spent rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan, but the U.S. has sent only \$135 million in aid to Libya.¹⁰ The State Department also announced that it has sought no new congressional funding for aid to Libya.¹¹

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¹ See *Muammar al-Qaddafi Biography*, BIOGRAPHY.COM, <http://www.biography.com/people/muammar-al-qaddafi-39014> (last visited Nov. 1, 2011).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ See Missy Ryan and Phil Stewart, *After Gaddafi, Can U.S. Keep Libya at Arm's Length?*, REUTERS.COM (Oct. 20, 2011, 5:57 PM), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/20/us-usa-libya-future-idUSTRE79J8KW20111020>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

Whether U.S. companies end up investing in Libya likely will depend on how quickly the country becomes secure again.¹² Firms that construct or maintain oil fields are currently the only American companies doing business in Libya.¹³ But whom will seize control of Libya's lucrative oil fields remains to be seen as the country continues to form its new government.¹⁴ A process that should take time with Libya lacking numerous government organizations,¹⁵ but – unlike in Iraq and Afghanistan – the U.S. appears disinterested in attempting to expedite this process.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ See *Factbox: Who's in Charge of Libya's Oil Industry?*, REUTERS.COM (Sep. 8, 2011, 7:14 AM), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/08/us-libya-oil-personnel-idUSTRE7872BP20110908>.

¹⁵ See Ryan and Stewart, *supra* note 7.