



Beyond the Headlines
December 7, 2011
Washington, DC

Covering Libya: A View from the Front Lines

Missy Ryan
Reuters

Mary Beth Sheridan
The Washington Post

Patricia Ellis: Good afternoon and welcome to everyone. We are pleased you could all join us for one of our very special Beyond the Headlines Series. We have, for those of you not familiar with us, an Author Series, a Beyond the Headlines Series, and we have an Embassy Series. We do mentoring and have big events celebrating women leaders, but these are our seminar style events and they're very popular. This year we've had them on Pakistan, Afghanistan, Egypt, and other pressing issues. We hope that you will all become members and join us for these events in 2012. We have one more event left this year, one of our Embassy Series events, these are very special events, and we have one with the French Ambassador on *France's Role on the International Stage*, so it should be very exciting. Let me introduce myself. I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the WFPG. We promote women's leadership and women's voices. We've had a great year and are looking forward to next year and plan to have many more exciting events.

This program could not be timelier, and we're really lucky to have two fantastic journalists who were on the ground during the revolution and the end of the war. I'm just going to give you a few highlights on their bios because at lunch time we want to get right into hearing from them and have plenty of time for the Q&A, so we'll try to get to as many questions as possible. I'm going to start with Mary Beth Sheridan, and I just want to welcome her back, she's been a moderator at a couple of our events, and she has a new position. She recently became the night editor for foreign and national news at *The Washington Post* and she spent the last three weeks of the war in Libya, but she has been all over the world. She joined *The Post* in 2001 and prior to that, she worked for AP, *The Miami Herald*, and for *The LA Times*, so thank you for joining us. And Missy Ryan, this is our first time with her and we're really happy to have her here. She covers US military policy and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan for Reuters. She spent 20 months in Baghdad, where she served as the deputy bureau chief there, but she has covered many parts of the world, and in terms of the Middle East, she has reported from Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, and as I mentioned Afghanistan and Pakistan. I've asked both of them to talk about their experiences on the ground, on the front lines, what it was like. People are always so curious to know how hard it is to cover with [what] the security situation is like—especially as a woman, and then we will move to the reflections on what the challenges are that lie ahead for Libya on so many different levels. So I'm going to turn first to Mary Beth and have her lead off, and please join me in welcoming her. [Applause.]

Mary Beth Sheridan: Thank you very much. About noon on October 20, my translator and I arrived in Tripoli. We had just spent the last week in Misrata and Sirte covering the last phase of the war and Moammar Qaddafi. Sirte had held up for weeks, we thought it was going to fall. Suddenly, the translator's phone rings—Sirte had fallen, the Libyan war was over. The city erupted in celebration, people were honking horns, waving flags, and firing off every sort of armament possible, machine guns, automatic weapons, anti-aircraft guns, you name it—and then an extraordinary fervor began to fix the city—Qaddafi was dead. It was just the most amazing, thorough joy I'd ever seen. Long into the night there were fireworks, tracer guns, there were people yelling and singing Allahu Akbar. I was really struck with the complete contrast in Baghdad, where I had arrived eight years earlier, two days after Saddam Hussein was overthrown. I think Iraqis were relieved to be free of Saddam, at least most of them, but they were angry, and I felt like there was an air of menace in Baghdad. Mobs set fire to buildings, there was looting,

and I remember going to a prison a few days after Saddam had fled the city and people were looking for their family members who had been taken away, political prisoners, and I remember one man saying, "We're glad you Americans overthrew Saddam, but you shouldn't stay." I thought what was really remarkable about the Libyan revolution was the incredibly powerful sense of hope. Libyans felt the revolution was theirs, even if NATO helped a lot, and they were quite grateful for that help, the help, the dedication, and the commitment.

Pat asked me what it's like to cover the war—now I just want to emphasize, I was there and some of my colleagues covered the war at even more dangerous points, and I don't want to over-emphasize any risks that I personally undertook, and some of our colleagues unfortunately lost their lives, two of our photographers. The first thing you have to figure out are always the logistics. When I got to Libya, Sirte was really the last hold-out and there had been lots of fighting there for over a month, and so the city when I got there was quite largely destroyed, there was no running water, no electricity or Internet, no stores open to sell food, and there was a hardy band of journalists that sort of just camped out in Sirte. They slept on floors, they ate tuna fish out of a can, and they didn't shower. But a larger group of journalists, including me, stayed in the nearest city that did have services, which was Misrata, which did have clean beds, food and Internet, and semi-clean bathrooms. But to say Misrata was the closest city isn't to say it was "close"—it was two-and-a-half hours away from Sirte, so every morning we would get up and make sure the car was filled with body armor and chocolate and water, and drive two-and-a-half hours and do our reporting and drive back, and I'd be typing on my laptop as we returned and there was practically nothing in the middle between Misrata and Sirte, just desert and camels, and it was really something. So the thing about a war zone of course is that you have to think on your feet, and you really have to do the calculations on how much risk you take to get the story that you need. On the first morning we went to Sirte, and when we left the hotel we were lucky enough to find a freelancer who wanted a ride and he did know the city, which was good because we had been told not to just "wing it," because one wrong turn and you could wind up with the Qaddafi forces and that could have a really bad end. Anyway, he took us around to the bombed out areas, to the hospitals, and one of the great, lucky things at being in a hospital of a war zone is that your competitors really become your colleagues, your allies, and your friends, and we ran into a Reuters colleague who had been in Sirte for a couple of weeks and was very nice, and I said, "Well, how close can we get to the front line to find out what's going on but not take a bullet? And he said, "We sort of have a little encampment, so follow me." So off we went through the streets of Sirte and arrived at sort of this bombed out shopping mall where indeed Reuters had set up this makeshift center and facilities and so on, and one thing that's really different and that's changed for journalists covering war is our own physical and typical safety preparations. We all had the head and body armor, better than the rebels who were doing the fighting actually, and a lot of reporters had private security which is really, really helpful.

Anyway, we arrived at this encampment and got out of the car and my Reuters colleague said, okay, well the front line is about two blocks up there and just sort of hug the buildings as you walk and you'll be alright. He had a security guard, a former British military officer, who overheard this and said, "Wouldn't do that, that street has been swarmed with snipers all day long that would be a really bad idea." So I thought alright, this isn't it, and fortunately for me since the story I was doing, which was an overall story about Sirte, it was good enough to flag down the rebel trucks returning from the front lines, and we were able to get enough interviews that we got a reasonable picture of the city and didn't have to get shot for it. But when I was there in terms of covering the actual fighting, it was moving back a block, up a block, so we didn't feel like it was necessary to cover every single day's movement and there were other things going on. One of the things I wanted to do a story on was political prisoners. At that point there were about 7,000 of them in Libya, and they were being held at all sorts of schools, sports stadiums, and office buildings, and there were reports of torture, so we were trying to figure out how we would get in. The thing about Libya is I felt at that point the rules had just gone out the window. It was such a repressive country, people were so controlled, and all of a sudden that was missing. However, lots of paperwork continued, this is a country that loves bureaucracy, and I think it stems from the old days when people were afraid to make a decision so they needed a piece of paper to really sell them. So we went to the military commander, the rebel commander of Misrata, and we told him we'd like to go to the prisons and that we

know you guys are doing a great job now and we feel like it's important to get in there so will you give us the permission. And he said, "Well I'm not in charge of that, you have to go to the individual prisons and ask them." And we said, "Could you just write us a little note asking people if they would help us journalists with whatever we're doing and stamp it?" So he did that, and so that was our pass into the different prisons in Misrata. Another reason that I think that story worked so well is that people were quite enamored with the idea of democracy and with the rebels, you really felt like they were on the side of right and good and to them there was a moral component and sometimes we'd try to go in to speak to someone and they wouldn't want to see us so we'd say, "Well, you have a democracy now, right, and in a democracy you have to talk to us." And they'd say "Oh, okay," and they'd offer every word, every single word. [Laughter.]

In terms of the challenge facing Libya, they're enormous of course and they haven't had a democracy. Civil society organizations have mostly been illegal or under distress for decades, the current central government is fairly weak, and of course the biggest challenge that they're facing is how to get control of these hundreds of militias, the rebel groups, who effectively run the show on the ground. They're starting to move on that front, but of course it's going to be very difficult and there's a very real, fresh sense of regionalism which feeds into this problem with militias. A quick word on women—I found a tremendous sense of empowerment in the revolution, we can talk more about that if you want. I found women important largely in their role of supporting the fighting, funneling money, cooking, smuggling weapons, etc. Women are playing a huge role now in the flowering of civil society groups in Libya, however, they are not represented in the government, which is a problem. I would conclude by saying that the reasons for activism are it's a very small country, only 6 million people, compared to 80 million in Egypt, they have a lot of oil, and they're now up to more than half of the pre-war oil output. So I feel like with all of these revolutions, of some of the drivers, one is economic, people really complained about the oil wealth and how you couldn't see it in things like hospitals and schools, so if the government can manage to start showing people that their life will be better, I think it could really continue to generate this momentum. One last point, and this is hard to quantify, and who knows how long it will last, but I just found there to be a normal sense of goodwill. People were immensely enthusiastic, they had suffered so much for so long and they had kind of done the impossible, and I think there was a deep sense of desire to make this work, and one story I will tell you just so you can get a sense of this security and a sign of this goodwill—on the day before I left, we'd been working flat out, and I said to my translator, how about if we go shopping for an hour in the souk, get some souvenirs, and off we went. And there's not too much to buy in Libya but one of the things they have that is spectacular are women's shoes, these party shoes, so I went into a store and saw a pair I liked and asked the guy how much they were, and he said, "For you they're free," and I said "What?!" And he said, "They're free because you helped us with the revolution," and I said, "Oh no, I can't take free shoes," and he shook his head and said, "I have made an oath to Allah that I thank the foreigners who helped with the revolution, so anything you want in the store is free." [Laughter.] Anyway, that's the story and the souvenir of my time in Libya and my part in the revolution.

Ms. Ellis: Thank you. [Applause.] Now Missy, you can take over.

Missy Ryan: First of all, I would like to thank the Women's Foreign Policy Group for having me, it's a great honor for me and I look forward to getting to know some of you better in the future. I think my perspective on media coverage of the Libyan conflict is quite different than Mary Beth had just because of the time that I was there and where I was. I spent five weeks in Libya this summer, and I lived in Qaddafi-controlled Libya the whole time, in Tripoli, and then we side-tripped to places like Beni Walid and Sirte, but it was professionally very challenging to deal with and operate within a government that really in 40 years had never had a free media. They just weren't used to having questions asked, or ideas or statements challenged, and it set up a really tense relationship from the beginning of the uprising in February between the foreign reporters who were in Tripoli trying to cover the Qaddafi side of things. We thought that our job was to go out, talk to people, understand the situation, and try to get some conceptual portrait of who supported Qaddafi, who didn't support Qaddafi, and why, in Qaddafi-controlled areas. That was almost impossible to do just because of the extremely restrictive rules that were laid out for us as a condition to be able to enter Tripoli. All of the foreign journalists who were reporting from Tripoli were required to stay at a luxury five-star hotel, which I'm sure was much, much nicer than where

Mary Beth was staying in Misrata. It was actually a hotel where many government officials lived and state TV was broadcast from the basement of the hotel, and I mention that only because this was one of the few places in Tripoli that were guaranteed not be bombed by NATO. The airstrikes were continuous, the Qaddafi regime saw some of its non-military sites destroyed as well, and so I think many of the government officials came and stayed with us at this hotel.

On a daily basis, we were prohibited from going out and setting up interviews and being able to wander the streets and talk to people. They would bus us to very-tightly choreographed pro-Qaddafi rallies with hundreds, sometimes thousands, and you just had no idea who these people were, why they were there—were they being paid, were they authentic Qaddafi supporters? Reporters were accompanied at all times by these people who were sort of interpreters but mostly minders, and sometimes you would go and have an interview and the minder would coach the person you were talking to, and correct them if they said something that seemed like it wasn't as pro-Qaddafi as it should have been. So as you can imagine, this was an extremely frustrating thing for us because we really did want to present an authentic picture to the world of what was happening, and really, if we had taken the Qaddafi government's line, every single person in Tripoli would have considered the rebels, as they called them, the rats. And for me it was the first time, even for someone who has had experience working in conflict zones, it was the first time I had ever worked in a true police state. After the government fell, we found proof that they had been surveilling our emails, and I'm virtually certain that they had also been monitoring our phone calls. If we had something very sensitive to talk about, we'd use our satellite phones. The few reporters who were able to reach out to local opposition in Tripoli, which was something very sensitive for the Qaddafi regime, were kicked out of the country. The government really considered us to be agents of NATO, they really thought foreign reporters such as myself were calling in airstrikes to NATO. They told us that we overlooked the crimes of NATO and that we disregarded the lives of Libyans when they were hit by NATO airstrikes—I was personally called "scum" on state television for an article I wrote. So it was a very tense environment and we never really knew what the Qaddafi government was capable of doing and this was sort of the problem. As the rebels entered Tripoli in late August, I became one of about a group of 30 foreign journalists who were held against our will in this hotel for about four days. We were held by Qaddafi volunteer gunmen who must have been young guys of about 18, 19, 20 years old, without any training, with their AK-47s. They were very stressed out. The hotel staff disappeared, and we had to forage in the basement of the hotel for food. We were unable to communicate with the outside world for most of that time because the cell phone service had gone off, and we weren't able to go outside to use our satellite phones like we normally would because there were snipers on the roof of the hotel, and there was a great deal of fighting, including a big RPG battle in the driveway of the hotel. It was pretty tense, we were pretty lucky in that, I think with some pressure from the US and UK governments, the International Committee of the Red Cross agreed to come in and evacuate us, which they did, and we left in about a minute and a half.

It was really such a striking experience to have spent weeks in Tripoli where there was this sort of veneer of calm, this veneer of Qaddafi being somewhat invulnerable, obviously they were telling us that their military might was not diminished by the NATO airstrikes. There was anti-rebel graffiti everywhere, pictures of Qaddafi everywhere, and so then we spent four days inside of this hotel, with the government and then we see as the government falls, everything falls, with a few exceptions, and then we emerge and it's an entirely different city, it had just flipped entirely. All of the pro-Qaddafi graffiti had been replaced with anti-Qaddafi graffiti, there were rebel flags everywhere, people and children dancing in the streets, music, and that was really striking and underscored that despite the government's efforts, it was unable to suppress what really was an indigenous resentment that came about after Qaddafi's 42 years in power. Just a few points about where Libya is today. I agree that I think it's a very exciting time in Libya, as it is in most of the Arab Spring nations, but I also think it's a very delicate time, the interim government is in power until the middle of next year. The security, as Mary Beth said, remains tenuous, the great problem at the moment is the refusal by the militias to disarm. They've been given a deadline until the end of the year, but really I think that from the militia's point of view, there's not necessarily a good reason for them to give up their weapons if they're unsure number one about which direction the country is heading in, and number two, if a national army that can be raised, who will it actually be protecting. I think that it's quite important to remember that virtually everybody is armed in Libya, and you saw this with women, and

young boys of eight or nine who had weapons, Qaddafi had distributed weapons at the beginning of the conflict to repel the rebels and so there are just a huge amount of guns everywhere and that makes for a very explosive situation.

For me, the crux of the challenge facing Libya today is the lack of a common vision for what kind of state it's going to be in the post-Qaddafi era. So there are all these major questions that the country has to settle, such as the role of religion, and the role of women and minorities like the Berbers. We're seeing the same things in Tunisia and Egypt, this lack of a unified idea about what the future should be, certainly there's still this type of violence in Iraq. All of these same tensions were repressed during the Qaddafi-era, and then I think these tensions were sort of masked by the pro- versus anti-Qaddafi idea during the uprising era, and now they're probably not, and I think, to me, that is the major challenge they're going to be facing. Finally, on women in Libya, they did enjoy greater freedom under Qaddafi than women do in some other parts of the Arab world. I think that was in part because it was nominally a socialist regime, and you know, as we said, there were certainly women taking up arms, but the women have also borne the brunt of this conflict, as you see in most conflicts, in terms of losing husbands and sons. There are a number of cases of rape being used as a military tool that are being investigated now. I'm sure everyone remembers hearing about the famous incident of this woman, Eman Obeidy, coming in March to the hotel where the journalists were staying and saying she had been gang-raped by Qaddafi soldiers. And finally, I think that the big picture question for women in Libya is whether the country takes a more politically Islamic direction, what will this mean for women? With something similar happening in Tunisia right now, women are worried about having greater restrictions imposed on what they can do professionally, what they can wear, what their rights may be in family courts and things like that, and so I'll leave it there.

Ms. Ellis: Good place to stop, because I'm going to lead off with a few questions and one of them relates to elections in the neighboring countries in Tunisia and Egypt, and what you see as the likelihood of the same Islamists winning the elections and what are the implications, because already in Libya they talked about the repeal of the ban on polygamy and other things like that, and yet I think in one of your articles you talk about how some of the women were saying yes, but they believe in sharia law so I'm just wondering the general implications. I'm going to throw out three quick questions, and you can address them and then we'll go to the audience.

The other one relates to the area of future challenges, and one of them has to be jobs, the economy—how long is it going to take to get the oil up and flowing, and letting the population share in the benefits of the country—usually these honeymoons are pretty short.

The last question relates to what you see as the role of the US going forward and what the intention will be with NATO operations and what are the expectations given our budgetary climate, can we possibly offer aid?

Ms. Sheridan: With the question of Islamism in Libya, in my opinion, they are way more conservative socially than Egypt or Tunisia and this isn't a post-Qaddafi idea. In some ways it was a reaction to Qaddafi. But I was really struck by how conservative it is and would find myself wanting to question people, and ask, "What do you want to do that you're not doing already?" Alcohol is banned and the people I talked to thought that not even a small amount for foreigners should be accepted. Ninety-five percent of women wear the head scarf, which is something that occurred under Qaddafi. There's a very traditional sense within these families that women and particularly young women should not be alone in the company of a man who's not a relative, which you know is a bit of a problem for some of the Western men who were in there trying to work with the government and would maybe want to get a taxi or something, so a very conservative social culture. And it's funny because I think that the statements that were raised when I was there in the prison, talking about polygamy potentially occurring more regularly, there was concern amongst a small group of intelligentsia and probably among university women, but the changes that were being discussed in the polygamy law were actually not implemented very well in Libya so this makes it easier. What I'm sort of seeing as dramatic is that surprisingly a number of women, educated women said to me, "Well, we really don't have a problem with that, we've got a tug-of-war with

them, we need to be able to have our husbands and be protected.” I was struck by how, to Libyans, this is not seen as a radical thing, apart from a small group, so I guess I feel like Islamists are an important group. Militarily they were very important, so they’ll play a role in implementing these ideas, I think they’ll have to. But I don’t see them going to an Afghanistan-style of sharia, Afghanistan Taliban is what I’m referring to. I think there will be issues but I think women have a very tiny role in the government right now, and I think that’s a problem, but I think you have to bear in mind how conservative that culture really is.

Jobs I agree are a huge thing, I think one of the problems is there were a lot of foreign companies that were operating in the country and then shut down, and that trickled down. You have some people that want to stay in the militias, with these military and rebel groups because their jobs have disappeared, so at least that pays them a salary and gives them something to do. So when it comes to creating jobs it’s going to be really, really important, but I think recently there has been intelligent people who are in charge of the economy and that could help, especially with the oil money they have.

In terms of the role of the US, you know I think what’s interesting is that I don’t think the US is planning for a demand in a lot of financial aid in that Libya does have resources, but I think there could be a lot of assistance and expertise provided on things such as writing a constitution, running a Congress, and all that stuff, and the US is held in high regard right now in Libya.

Ms. Ryan: I think I’ll just go straight to the question on jobs and the economy. I think one is the major changes in Libya after Qaddafi and how that will go, and the departure of a huge force of third-country nationals who kept a lot of the economy going in service jobs, especially people who would come in from the Philippines and lots of workers from other parts of Africa. Many of those people left during the conflict, but they may come back.

Ms. Ellis: They did stop a group of Africans who were trying to get to Italy.

Ms. Ryan: Yes, a lot of those are tied up in ideas, many of them are incorrect about mercenaries, I think dark-skinned Africans have gone underground in Libya since the uprising, so whether or not those workers return, Libyans may want to take those jobs—my guess would be probably not, just because I think that there’s been an idea of Libya in the past that many people who are more educated would prefer to have white-collar jobs. That said, the fact that the privileged position they’re in of having vast amounts of oil resources might smooth over some of the minor social conflicts people might expect over the next 12 months, so if people feel like services are coming along, and perhaps if financial support is given to some of the groups in society who feel like they’re not getting what they need otherwise. But before the conflict, Libya was leaning heavily toward an opening of embracing Western companies in a pretty abrupt way, if you go around Tripoli, you’ll see what looks like all these half-built, giant, luxury condo buildings, and if that could be recaptured it could be really good for Libya. This may seem somewhat far-fetched at this point but Tunis, Tunisia, has a very developed tourist industry and Libya also has lots of nice Mediterranean coastline so if everything goes according to a best case scenario, they may be able to tap this area that they never did before.

On the US role going forward, I really expect a very modest diplomatic and aid presence in Libya. I think that that is really in line with what has been described as the Obama doctrine on the military involvement in Libya and “leading from behind,” another catchphrase that describes how the American military didn’t want to be seen as making the big decisions or pursuing the most aggressive attacks, and I think that we’ll also see that in the civilian presence afterwards. Also, part of it is, there’s not the appetite for it or the money for it.

Ms. Ellis: So let’s go ahead and open it up. I’m going to take a few questions at once, if that’s okay with you, if you could identify yourself please and keep the questions brief.

Question: Hi, my name is Nadine Hoffman, and I’m with the International Women’s Media Foundation, and Mary Beth, I was interested in the comment you made about how much risk you take to get the story

you need and I'm curious to hear from both of you about how you calculate that threshold of risk when you're going into a conflict zone, and how your media outlets prepared you for personal safety training or what steps the news outlets are taking to prepare reporters for these situations.

Question: Hi, thank you very much for your comments. My name is Susana Florian with Parsons, and I am very interested in hearing your interpretation as to who is in charge now as far as the caliber of people is concerned. The reason I'm asking is because I have gotten a couple of different opinions. One thing was that someone said the people are mostly inward focused, and by this I mean for instance, an electrical engineer who has not stepped foot outside of Libya, yet I attended a couple of different events and discussions with the ambassadors and many diplomats and people in attendance, and the US State Department commented related to who is in charge will be the opposite of who is under the conditions of the Libyans who will be overseeing the poorly-trained but open-minded people. I also wanted to add that I believe you stayed at the Corinthia Hotel?

Ms. Ryan: It was the Rixos Hotel.

Question: Because I stayed at the Corinthia many times before the revolution and I was told by a friend that the rooms were bugged so I was wondering if that was true.

Question: My membership in this group is on a personal level, and so my comments are purely personal. I have been to Libya and have led business delegations to Libya 2004-2008. Talking about Islamists, in discussions with the Libyans, they don't have an official imam, they are a conservative society, not as conservative as some in the Arab world, they do often have their women cover up, but they are allowed to drive, they are allowed to work, there was not only a big contribution from Libyan women in Libya, but from Libyan women living elsewhere that helped during the revolution, so I just want to make sure that it's not really Islamist. They are conservative yes, but women work, they contribute to society, they drive, there were a few women that were elected in the district governments. They are not as liberal as we are, but in their culture they are really, really happy.

Ms. Sheridan: So I would just say, I worked in Iraq for awhile, not as long as Missy, but I was sent to a week-long training course. A lot of it was on how to act and respond in a war zone, how do to emergency medicine and that kind of thing, so basically that was the training that I had. The caliber of people, that's an interesting question. You know the Prime Minister, I wouldn't say that that's true that he hasn't been outside of Libya, he's an American, and he is a dual citizen and taught for many years at the University of Alabama. Frankly, he's not a well-known guy inside or outside of Libya, but he is an American. Right now I think the whole government is really overly focused on how to grapple with this enormous issue of transforming Libya and the last Prime Minister, Jabril, was always criticized because he was always outside Libya, but one thing during the revolution, he hadn't traveled to coordinate with NATO and get foreign support and all that. But I think they elected a cabinet this week and I don't know all the members of that, but I think the previous one had a real mixture of people. It seemed to me there are a lot of Western technocrats, people who studied in the West, in the US or Britain, but it's mostly people like Mahmoud Jabril, he's not one of those foreign technocrats and he's not the sort of a guy who's a polished public speaker, but what struck me was that he was perhaps more successful than some of these Western-educated guys in the sense that he can forge consensus behind the scenes, and to Libyans, he could be seen as a humble guy, not a showy guy, and I heard of a couple of instances where he sort of diffused tensions, and when he brought up the idea about a stricter, more Islamic government, I was told by some of his aides that was more or less to keep the Islamists in the fold. He wanted to make sure everyone in Libya was equal and happy. And the last question on women—you know I did a whole story on women in Libya and their role in the revolution, so I am just struck with this immensely contradictory nature of women's position there. I mean, under Qaddafi, the number of women in universities there grew tremendously and also the number of women who worked outside the home, and I think Qaddafi encouraged that. On the other hand, what was really striking to me was that after the revolution, I was going around and asking everybody, "How has your life changed?" or "What's the most important change?" With women, I was really struck by how many said, "I can now move around freely," and I said, "Well, why

couldn't you do that before?" Well, because I think the Qaddafi people and groups in Libya were seen with a lot of impunity, they could do whatever they wanted, and so if you have family—male protection for women is really widespread in Libya—so fathers were worried about their daughters, and they didn't want them going to these places where they could be hit on really by some of these Qaddafi goons, but I found, among women, now they feel much freer, and despite the fact that they have militias all over the place who are, you know, really not under any kind of control, I heard no incidence of a woman being harassed by those guys, I mean those guys were sort of proud of what they'd done and also in the sense that they treated women well.

Ms. Ryan: Just to add on the question of preparation, all journalists that I know of, all Western journalists, are required to do their hazardous environment training, that said, most of what you learn is from the knowledge and experience that you've gained over time and being in different kinds of situations. I think it's something that becomes intuitive in some ways, but then it also involves very difficult judgment calls, and even very experienced war correspondents make decisions that sadly result in injury or death to them or to people that they work with, so there are no easy answers. In terms of who's in charge and the caliber of people who are going to be covering Libya from here on out, at this point it's sort of a composite group that consists of some of these expats, businessmen and academics who sort of came on to the NTC in the very beginning, some of them don't really have constituencies in Libya, that obviously was a problem in Iraq when it happened there, it could be a problem here too. Also, some members of the Qaddafi regime sort of switched sides early, and then the third component would be what we would probably call Islamists, and so I think what is really unclear at this stage is who among that pool in the NTC and now in the provisional government, when there is an election next year, which of those groups really comes to the top and who can actually control what are bound to be conflicts over what direction Libya should go in. Finally, on the women, I agree it's very difficult to make any sort of generalized statement about the welfare of women in the Muslim world in part because particular behaviors and freedoms are always so specific to location and person and often things like veiling—you know colleagues that I had in Baghdad for example, I worked with one woman who would wear short skirts and have her hair done every day, and she defended her right to be able to do that. I worked with another woman who believed it was the place of the woman to cover up as much as possible so she did that and I think that clearly from a Western perspective we would like to see women have the freedom to choose, that would be the crucial element, but it's a very complex question.

Ms. Ellis: Okay, we're going to take the next three questions and we'll ask you to keep them brief.

Question: Hi, my name is Swathi Balasubramanian and I work at IREX, and my question is, I would like to get your perspective as international journalists on the health of the media sector in Libya, I mean we can all assume that they're starting from scratch, but from the local people's experience and the people that you've probably worked with and others you may have met, do you see journalists coming about? There's a media center in Benghazi that's pretty well known, but what do you see—is it a priority?

Question: I'm Dan O'Flaherty with the National Foreign Trade Council. Given the very high international interest the United States has in Libya, and given the unlikelihood that they are going to devote a lot of resources, what can you tell us about the role of the Europeans and what you were seeing on the ground in terms of their involvement and seeing Libya as their problem?

Question: Stephenie Foster, I do consulting and I've been to many of the same countries as you have been, doing mostly civil society work, and my question is, and I know you alluded to this, but what do you think people's expectations are in Libya in terms of what democracy means?

Ms. Sheridan: On the first question on the health of the media sector and how the media is developing—I don't read Arabic unfortunately, so I know there are newspapers popping up all over the place, but it's difficult for me to assess the quality. From the journalists I met who seemed decent, I learned there's a TV channel, and there was a program that my translator was watching and he would translate for me, and it's not bad. Obviously, starting out, the production quality is not the best, but they seemed to ask some good

questions, and I thought they were doing okay. There was a question on what will the role of the Europeans be in Libya. My impression is that they're trying to rush in and sign deals as fast as possible, this is really the private sector I'm talking about. Their embassies are very involved in encouraging involvement—the Italians, who were already pretty heavily invested in Libya, the French, the Turks, they are all very eager and had an important presence there. I think they were eager to get government contracts and the government was kind of hesitant to do a lot of contracting until they sort out the politics. People's expectations of democracy, great question—I asked that of people a lot and there were really a range of answers, but I also thought—well, put it this way, people expect more freedom, they expect economic development. I said to one guy, and currently a state industrialist in Misrata, “Do you really think things are going to work and there is going to be a democracy?” And he said to me, “It has to be better than what we had.” So I think there's a certain level of realism. A number of people said to me when I asked, “What do you want for the future of Libya?” They said, “We want to be Dubai.” [*Laughter.*] But certainly the regions that were discriminated against under Qaddafi, such as Benghazi, they expect democracy.

Ms. Ryan: On the media question, I actually left right after the fall of Tripoli, so I can really only talk about what existed under the regime which was a small number of media organizations that were totally co-opted by the government, even if they weren't officially state media. That said, there were a number of people who worked as stringers or Western media organizations who clearly, if they had been given more freedom, would be able to do more, their questioning was more effective. I would expect that the television media in Libya will bounce back quickly more so than the print media, given what I saw of the rebel TV stations that existed. Also, there are such strong models in Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya and other Arab media. In terms of European interest, I think again there are not only corporate interests that are going to arise suddenly from France and Italy, but also a fear of mass migrants coming into the Mediterranean countries, I think this is a more compelling issue more so than the economic interests on the diplomatic policy from countries like France, Spain, Italy and to a lesser extent, the UK. In terms of what democracy will mean, it is a great question. I think that first of all it means not having Qaddafi around, not to have to worry that a political idea is enough to get you tortured or imprisoned or executed. The danger of course is that the new Libyan democracy will not deliver what are probably unrealistically high expectations. It simply can't meet people's expectations over such a short period of time and I think that's one of the major tipping points we're going to see over the next year.

Question: I'm Donna Wolf, and I'm a retired foreign service officer, and I was most recently in Tunisia and watched the Libyan developments from there, I'd just like to speak a little bit to the Islamist question because that came up a lot in Tunisia, and what happened there was during the oppressive times under Ben Ali, the groups most deeply persecuted against were the Islamists, and their story of fighting the regime was most prudent, the most critical. Therefore, in the election results it was not unusual that the Islamist party gained such a large percentage because they want to be able to keep that notion of that struggle, of “what are we trying to do” for our people. The other thing to keep in mind as we see the other Islamist results coming in from Egypt as well, and that is that most of the regimes, both Mubarak and Ben Ali did not want to deal with religion at all and they totally abdicated a role in keeping religious education and left it to the Islamists and the Wahhabis and messages that came through on the satellite TV channels—very, very conservative, very Saudi-focused, and very Wahhabist. So, a whole generation was educated with that extreme, assertive, religious view and the question is how do you then bring that back? How do you make it more secular, more in keeping with these new governments?

Question: My name is Dara McLeod, I'm with Refugees International and you both touched on the militias and the fact that these countries are very well armed with this. When we were there in October we documented several cases of death among other Africans and black Libyans, which continues. I'm just curious do you think that this latest incarnation is a trend and does the provisional government have the capacity or the political will to try and reign in these militias and try to control them?

Question: My name is Jill Morehead, I'm with Mercy Corps. I spent two and a half months in Libya shortly after everything started, from April to July and one of the things they would always show on state TV were these huge, mass gatherings in Green square saying 40,000 Libyans in Tripoli were supporting Qaddafi.

I'm just curious if you on your bus-choreographed trips, if they would ever take you to this—did you ever see anything that massive? Maybe it was a few thousand, but was it made to look bigger?

Ms. Sheridan: I'll take a whack at the first two. You know, one of the things that I think is true in Libya and I think it's probably also true in Egypt as well. When you look at the vote you say, "Why are people going to the Islamists?" Do they want a Saudi style regime or whatever it is? Yeah, people forget outside these countries. Another big area for people is the corruption and in Libya, you know, it was very wide spread. So there's an appeal of the very religious that are seen as not corrupt and I am sure that will help them in the elections. Qaddafi had a crazy, whacky, relationship with Islam you know, he sort of used Islam in whatever way he felt was useful to him. He had his own interpretations, his own religious interpretations of Islamic text and all this. Anyway, he alienated and didn't really like the religious leadership. I think that one thing that you pointed out that's really important is that Libya got satellite TV six or seven years ago. My sense is that this has transformed the country. This is a country that was completely cut off from the rest of the world. My translator's favorite music to play in the car was the soundtrack to *Glee*, people would quote Oprah to me. It really is a curious phenomenon. TV brings everything to the Libyan people, Wahhabi preachers, it brings shows like *Law & Order* so that maybe people might think, "We could have a system of justice that works this way," which, in the end, wins out. Anyway, a lot of people speak English, not the majority.

Quick question on the reconciliation of the militias having retaliated against people who seem to be Qaddafi supporters, particularly against dark-skinned Libyans and foreigners and so on. My sense is that the senior people recognize that reconciliation is a big issue and should be dealt with for having control of the people on the ground. You know, I was struck when I was there that one of the leading imams on the Friday, after Qaddafi was killed, held huge prayers at noon at Green square and a major theme was reconciliation. So, I feel like the right sort of messages if you will, are coming down from the high—but the problem is that the hatred on the ground runs so deep. You look at place like Sirte, will that be re-built? I don't know what is going to happen to these people, similarly in Tawergha, the city near Mirsrata. I think that is going to be an issue that is going to continue to be a problem.

Ms. Ryan: On the last two—first, the question about the rallies or the size of the rallies. I mean, certainly Qaddafi's propaganda machine was very energetic and exaggerated in everything they got. We would go to what was described as "million man marches" and see. I mean, it's true, it's very difficult to estimate the size of the crowd especially a very big one when you don't have a great vantage point, but, I never saw more than a couple thousand people at these rallies. That was a big point of contention between the government and the foreign media. They would also on a daily basis report civilians deaths from NATO airstrikes, and we basically did not take those seriously. We found them to be non-credible unless we were shown the bodies and it sounds very macabre but we knew that they lied about these things. There certainly were instances where NATO killed civilians and in those instances we saw these corpses. It is something that doesn't feel very good as a journalist to have to doubt whether or not a family has been killed because of a NATO accident. That was really the situation in terms of trying—winning the information war.

On whether or not the militias can be reigned in—I think that certainly there is the political will to do that I just don't know that they have the logistical and military capabilities anytime soon. We saw, I think it was last week, there was a plane that was supposed to take off from the Tripoli airport going to Tunisia and was blocked by a number of militias for a couple of hours. There is sort of a grey area between protesters and militias at this point and just because everybody is armed. I think that it is probably not going to happen by the end of the year deadline that would be just my guess. Really, I think the bigger question is what does this say how about quickly a unified military can develop and whether or not there is a possibility of a cycle of revenge of actually replacing the militias or disseminating from that.

Ms. Ellis: Well, we've come to the end of a fantastic program. I know we all learned a lot. Let's give everyone a round of applause. [*Applause.*]