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FRICION FOR THE FUTURE?  
QADDAFI'S LIBYA

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In the last few years, Qaddafi's Libya has appeared on the front pages of newspapers all around the world, not only for its active and "interventionist" foreign policy, but also for its alleged role in international terrorism.

This article intends to analyze briefly Libyan foreign, military and domestic policies. Furthermore, on the basis of the most recent events, it provides an assessment of the present situation and attempts to look into possible future trends.

Qaddafi's Libya

Captain, later Colonel Muammar al Qaddafi, emerged as a pre-eminent figure and charismatic leader of the small group of officers of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) which, after the coup in 1969, took command of Libya. In Dec. 1969, the Declaration of the Constitution designated the RCC as the supreme executive and legislative authority of Libya. Qaddafi was its chairman.

Following the Egyptian model, in 1971, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was formed. Its representative bodies, at the local, governorate and national level, were to constitute a direct link between the population and the RCC, on which they depend for their operation and their existence. In fact, ASU organ's resolutions had to be approved by RCC executive decrees in order to become effective. The RCC could also annul any ASU decision at any level and dissolve any of its organs.

On April 15, 1973, in his famous speech at Zouara, Qaddafi announced the beginning of a "cultural revolution" to destroy all ideologies imported from West and East and the creation of bodies - People's Committees - to implement it. The People's Committees were empowered to supervise and control, participate and intervene in management of public offices, banks, businesses, farms, universities, radio and television stations and press agencies - up to firing of officials or managers considered to be professionally inadequate or politically lukewarm (1).

Nevertheless, the real reins of power continued to be firmly in the hands of the RCC and, on closer analysis, in Qaddafi's hands.

The vague demarcation line between the responsibilities of the ASU, an organization aimed at mobilizing the masses, and the People's Committees, the main administrative instrument of the revolution, led to lack of cooperation and conflicts between the two organizations.

Moreover, despite the RCC's attempts to control their activity, the "guardian of the revolution" role carried out by the People's Committees, entailing the dismissal or transfer of thousands of officials, had a profound effect on the daily operation of the administrative structures and industrial productivity.

Fear of the formation of a new bureaucratic class and anarchist elements emerging from the People's Committees led to a new election in 1974 and reaffirmation by the RCC of the ASU's authority over the committees (2). This

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superiority was formalized in 1975. In April, Qaddafi announced a reorganization of the ASU, with a sharper division of responsibility, at least theoretically, between ASU People's Congresses and People's Committees. The committees were responsible for local administration; ASU congresses were responsible for political matters and for discussion of foreign and domestic policy lines presented to them by the executive. Given the superiority of politics over administration, the ASU also had the task of supervising and guiding the People's Committees.

In November of the same year, the General People's Congress (GPC) was established, composed of 618 members and comprising members of the RCC, leaders of the People's Congresses and the People's Committees and representatives of trade unions and professional organizations.

On March 2, 1977, still another transformation of the Libyan state structure took place. The Declaration of the Establishment of the People's Authority was adopted. The country's name was changed to Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (state of the masses). The RCC was abolished and its functions taken over by the General People's Congress. A General People's Committee was set up whose members carried out the same function as the previous "Council of Ministers", within the RCC. The General Secretariat of the General People's Committee, of which Qaddafi was Secretary General, included the four remaining members of the old RCC. Thus, at least theoretically, the General People's Congress became the ultimate legislative and executive body in Libya and the peak of the system of direct people's authority operated by Qaddafi.

Despite the popular participation in the General People's Congress, even after 1977, power was wielded by the General People's Committee and, more precisely, by Qaddafi who, besides being Secretary General of the General People's Committee, was also Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

In answer to the persisting inefficiencies of the governmental and administrative systems at a regional and local level, Revolutionary Committees were formed by the end of 1977. As in the past, solution of the problem was seen mainly in terms of superimposing new organs on those already existing. In fact, the function of the Revolutionary Committees seemed to be that of guiding the leaders of the People's Congresses and People's Committees, and of encouraging the masses to exercise their authority rather than just delegate it to representatives of those organizations. This involved the possibility of friction and conflict between the Revolutionary Committees and the People's Congresses and Committees.

Analyzing Qaddafi's attempts to apply to Libya the ideas contained in his "Green Book", the impression one gets is that of a deeply divided society, only superficially moved by a desire to carry on the revolution; partially disappointed in its expectations of progress and well-being, especially after the mounting economic difficulties of recent years; highly critical and frustrated in a few sectors - business, crafts, small farming and small industry - because of the radical nationalization and socialization measures which deprived them of their incomes; to a large degree still dependent on foreign manpower, even for jobs which did not call for any specialization (3); agitated by Islamic unity factions opposing the regime; behind in its industrialization plans and with difficult domestic agriculture prospects for the future (4).

During the '70s, Qaddafi's domestic policies seemed aimed at preventing the emergence of any one group - be it social, political or economic - which could take power from the masses. Even trade unions were regarded as a threat, being both power groups and worker representatives.

On the other hand, the concentration of real power in the Secretariat of the General People's Committee - and within it, in Qaddafi's hands - did not allow for effective political dialectics, even taking into account that Qaddafi's decisions have not always found full approval or support from popular government structures.

To present, no parallel or collateral powers (industrial, economic or socio-political) seem to have developed able to influence the political decisions of the heads of the General People's Committee or capable of having an effect on Libya's foreign and military policy.

Popular bodies, the People's Committees and Congresses and the Revolutionary Committees, do not have the political depth or sensitivity to promote any specific policy line. Logically, their range of action is substantially restricted to administrative matters and national, if not local, political questions. Then again, they do not seem to possess the required technical competence to be able to stimulate the GPC on external matters.

At the moment, Qaddafi's Libya is still going through a stage of transition, adjustment, experimentation and, in many respects, opposition and denial.

#### The Armed Forces and Libya's Military Policy

The institution-armed forces relationship leads to the question of to what degree the latter can, in Libya, be considered capable of influencing foreign policy decisions (5).

The military were the primary actors of the 1969 coup. Not only members of the Free Officers Movement, but also other army units joined and supported the ousting of the monarchy in Libya. The Revolutionary Command Council which governed the Libyan Arab Republic in the first years of its existence was composed of twelve men from the military services.

But the military, among them some members of the RCC, have also been the promoters of many of the attempts to replace Qaddafi and overthrow the regime (6).

Qaddafi dedicated enormous financial resources to the expansion and modernization of the armed forces. The defense budget jumped from 203 million dollars in 1975 to 709 million dollars in 1982. In the early '80s, the defence budget accounted for 20-21% of state expenditure (7).

Moreover, the armed forces increased from 32,000 men in 1975 to 73,000 in 1985 (8).

Today, the quantity and quality of Libya's armaments far exceeds its defense requirements as well as the capacity of its armed forces to use and manage them technically and logistically. The weapons, many of them technologically very sophisticated, such as T-72 tanks, or Mig-23, Mig-25 and Mirage F-1 aircraft, are not all Soviet-built, even if Moscow still is Tripoli's main supplier. Libya has diversified its imports, purchasing arms from France, Italy, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Spain and Brazil.

Foreign military personnel present in Libya as instructors or advisors includes Soviets (approximately 1800), East Germans, Pakistanis, North Koreans and Palestinians. In the 70s former Italian air force pilots provided basic flight training of Libyan pilots on the SIAI SF-260 aircraft.

On the whole, the Libyan armed forces give the impression of having considerable potential in terms of equipment and means, but limited capability from a technical-logistical and operational point of view. The relative success of military operations in Chad does not seem to have completely erased the reputation for unreadiness Libyan forces earned during the brief conflict with Egypt in 1977 and the debacle of its armed intervention in Uganda in support of President Idi Amin in 1979.

Even though in a different operational context, the lack of military preparation and the low level of combat readiness of Libyan armed forces were again demonstrated in March-April 1986 in the course of the American-Libyan military confrontations.

The manpower available seems to be sufficient for the armed forces (9). The main problem is the level of culture and technical education needed to operate and manage modern and highly technological weapons systems.

On the other hand, since the beginning of the '70s, Qaddafi declared that the armed forces were to be transformed into a people's army by means of general military training (10).

In the framework of the revolutionary program for total mobilization, in February, 1983, the eighth session of the GPC adopted a series of resolutions which were to implement the plan to substitute regular forces with a national guard formed by all citizens. Among the most significant were the requirement for all teachers under thirty to attend military schools for a certain period of time; introduction of military sciences in the normal curriculum of schools and universities; and introduction of the draft for all Libyans under retirement age (11).

At the end of April of the same year, Qaddafi announced the partial liquidation of the regular army. This declaration was preceded by one from the Libyan press agency stating that thousands of men from the regular armed forces were to be demobilized as a first step toward final abolition of the services themselves (12).

If Qaddafi's plan to create a people's army finds definitive approval and is actually implemented, then the role of the services within Libyan society will increase, at least in terms of diffusion and pervasion, but will presumably decrease in terms of ability to exert pressure and political influence and thus actually affect the process of foreign and military policy decision-making.

Although he stepped down from all public political positions on September 1, 1978 (13) including that of General Secretary of the GPC, Qaddafi remained the supreme commander of the armed forces. Two other officers from the former RCC are now at the head of the armed forces. If the purges, arrests and the forced resignations have not completely destroyed the ranks of the revolutionary movement of 1969, and if the new officers have managed to create ties of close collaboration and trust with the surviving figures of the old guard, then it should not be difficult to have the armed forces' requirements and demands, reach the country's decision-making center.

Attacks in the press on the armed forces, and in particular, at the officer class (14), with accusations of corruption, nepotism and anti-revolutionary activity, could be a sign of a lack of credibility and therefore, influence. But it could also, much more simply, be a means by which Qaddafi is trying to impose his much disputed project of a people's army and widen his consensus while warning opposition within the armed forces that any attempt at a counter-revolution could find itself without the necessary popular support.

If one considers the efforts and resources dedicated by Qaddafi to the modernization of the armed forces and if one assumes that the diversification of arms suppliers was not the result of a decision by Qaddafi imposed on the military, but rather a consequence of the acceptance of requests moved by the less pro-Soviet elements within the Secretariat of the GPC and within the armed forces, then it is reasonable to suppose that the military has a certain influence on decision-making centers and that it makes use of it. An alternative hypothesis would mean that the armed forces' demands are granted only when they fall in with Qaddafi's security and defense policy.

The most probable hypothesis is that the armed forces have in the past and still do make their voice heard in military matters.

But the impression is that Qaddafi would always reserve the right to the final decision and could enforce it, even if the armed forces were against it.

## Libyan Foreign Policy

Since 1969, Libya's foreign policy has moved along three main lines: pan-Arabism, that is, the establishment of Arab unity; anti-imperialism in the broadest sense of the word, even though essentially directed against the United States; national security and interests, which together with the two preceding components tend to take on transnational characteristics with expansionist projections.

This is a multidirectional policy which extends well beyond the regional confines of the Maghreb to the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa, central Africa and, more recently, the Comoro Islands, the islands of Dominica and Saint Lucia and the Mauritius Islands (15).

Interest in a specific area springs from the varying combinations of these three decisive factors, developed not only horizontally, that is, in geographic terms, but also vertically, that is, in historical-temporal terms.

Up to the end of the Yom Kippur war, pan-Arabism with a strong anti-Israeli accent seemed to be the determining factor in Libyan foreign policy. One has only to think of Libya's vain attempts at union with other Arab countries and its insistence on placing destruction of the State of Israel as a prerequisite and, at the same time, aim of Arab unity.

After 1973, while other Arab countries demonstrated a desire gradually to lay the foundation for a negotiated solution to the Middle East question, in which Israel's existence and the rights of the Palestinian population would be guaranteed - a solution in which the United States plays an all-important role - Libya put more emphasis on the anti-imperialist (and therefore anti-American) leaning of its revolutionary policy, accentuating its transnational components, and thus its expansionist characteristics, and maintaining its bitter anti-Israeli colouring. At the same time, agreement with Soviet policy became more evident and political ties between Tripoli and Moscow were strengthened. Libya's foreign policy appears marked by ostentation and a desire to be in the limelight as well as by the two other characteristics: unpreparedness and impatience. Improvisation has the upper hand over preparation and attempts to impose its policy internationally prevail over flexibility and willingness to compromise.

Qaddafi's ideology can only be used in part as a key to understanding of Libyan foreign policy. Rather than an expression of a consistent and coherent plan, it often seems the result of a series of reactions, aimed at exploiting favourable situations and occupying political gaps left by others.

Dedication to Arab unity remains a constant of Qaddafi policy. Changes in direction are often determined by contingent considerations and temporary detours due to setbacks or disappointments. Arab unity is fundamental and is expressed towards the more moderate or conservative Arab countries in the form of support to opposition forces - with obvious destabilizing effects in the region. Other Libyan foreign policy initiatives included: the elimination of opponents to the regime living abroad; the attempts to destabilize Tunisia (the support to the guerrillas who attacked the city of Gafsa in 1980); the drive to the south evidenced by Libyan support of Amin in Uganda and the intervention in Chad; the claims of sovereignty over the Gulf of Sidra; the friendship and "political, military and economic" cooperation treaty signed with Ethiopia and South Yemen.

For Libya the US is the most evident symbol of Western imperialism: an ally of Israel and a friend of Egypt; the promoter of a solution to the Middle East question based on respect of the right to exist of the State of Israel; present in the Mediterranean with a fleet often used as an instrument with which to challenge Libya's self-declared sovereignty over the Gulf of Sidra, and openly in favour of the fall of Qaddafi. At an international level the US represents the most troubling term of Libya's security equation. The aerial clash of August 19, 1981, when two F-14 "Tomcat" fighters of the Sixth Fleet on manoeuvre in the central Mediterranean shot down two Libyan Su-22 "Fitter" aircraft demonstrated that Washington was ready and willing to cross the threshold of military confrontation when necessary to defend its rights to operate in international waters and airspace. This was even better demonstrated by the American air raids in March and April 1986. The first was conducted by Sixth Fleet aircraft as a defensive action following Libyan missile attacks during a US naval exercise in the outskirts of the Sidra Gulf. The second, conducted by UK-based F-111 fighter bombers and Sixth Fleet attack aircraft against selected targets in Tripoli, Benghazi and Benina - was a punitive retaliation for the Libyan role in terrorist actions in Europe.

The American presence in the Mediterranean region is perceived by Libya as a direct, imminent and pervasive threat, not only because of its military force, but also because the United States is considered capable of influencing or even determining Egypt's behaviour and willing to provide military assistance to Cairo in case of a conflict with Libya.

The cruise missiles installed at Comiso in Sicily within the framework of NATO's nuclear modernization program are not perceived by Tripoli in an East-West perspective as a balance to Soviet Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces, but as weapons to be used in a North-South context and therefore, basically, as American weapons aimed at Libya.

In part to counter-balance the American threat and partially to compensate for its international isolation, Tripoli has, in recent years, strengthened ties with the Soviet Union. But relationship between Libya and the Soviet Union, which, for Qaddafi, is an atheist, ideologically removed and basically imperialist country, appear to be instrumental in the context of the fundamental objectives of Qaddafi's foreign policy, and do not seem to have reached the point of dependence. On the other hand, the Soviet Union does not appear very eager to establish more stringent links and has not yet decided to sign with Tripoli a treaty of friendship and cooperation similar to that signed with Syria.

## The Present and the Future

Of late, the role of supporter of international terrorism has become a distinctive feature of Libyan policy. Elements of actual implication of Libya in the financial support of many European terrorist groups have become fairly evident, such as direct or indirect implications in terrorist actions in Europe.

On the other hand, the statements and declarations of the Libyan leader and other Libyan officials in the aftermath of bombing attacks, or in terms of not-too covert threats against selected European countries, tend to confirm that Libya is ready and willing to support what it defines as "revolutionary" movements.

Since January 1986 there has been a mounting tendency of many European countries to reduce their imports of Libyan oil, an action that has evident repercussions on Tripoli's economy. Furthermore, on the eve of the American air raid the European countries decided the total ban of weapons systems exports to Tripoli plus a series of other restrictive measures.

After the American punitive attack on Libya, which appeared to have shocked Qaddafi, there have been rumours that he had lost large part of his power, even though retaining the post of head of the regime and remaining the charismatic symbol of the revolution.

According to these rumours a "troika" composed by Abdel Salam Jalloud, the number two of the Libyan hierarchy, by Major Humaidi, the commander of the popular militia and by Lt.Col. Karrubi, the chief of the military secret service, hold the real power in Tripoli.

Furthermore, again according to western sources, the new Libyan "troika" would be tightly controlled by Gen. Mikhail Bakov, head of the Soviet KGB in Libya.

Finally, within the "troika" a special role is thought to be assumed by Jalloud, who is said to be more keen on strengthening ties with the Soviet Union.

At present, it is not clear if a new course has been taken by Qaddafi as far as the support of international terrorism is concerned. Libya has reportedly cut down its financial contributions to national "revolutionary" groups and has acted to cut off terrorist actions which could be attributed to Tripoli, thus provoking a new American retaliatory raid.

However, the threatening declarations against the European countries, and in particular against some European Mediterranean countries, have persisted causing concern.

In this context, the British government has taken the decision to forbid the operations of Libyan Arab Airlines in Great Britain after clear evidence emerged that Libyan Airlines has been used in the past to smuggle explosive in England.

It is difficult to say what the future will bring. The show performed by Qaddafi at the non-aligned movement summit at Harare and the speech delivered to the delegates seem, at least in part, to contradict what has been said in the West about his practical removal from the center of power.

Domestically, then, the Libyan future appears still to be closely tied to the "Green Book".

In fact, the announcement in September 1986 that money would be abolished in Libya seems to point, if the measure is implemented, towards the continuation of the steady application to the Libyan society of Qaddafi's theories.

New attempts to overthrow Qaddafi are possible. However, the regime appears capable of confronting any internal threats, because the internal opposition seems to lack organization and widespread popular support.

In the foreign policy field, it is unlikely that Libya's future attitude and behaviour would be different from the past. The significant elements of Qaddafi's external policy will remain its radicalism, its strong anti-Israeli bias, its ideological commitment to the cause of Arab unity, its friendly self-serving relations with the Soviet Union.

As in the past, Libya's foreign policy will tend to favour and help, directly or indirectly, the accession to power of "revolutionary" movements in the Arab moderate, pro-Western countries.

And, as in the past, this policy will be conducted in a pragmatic, sometimes cautious way, exploiting all the opportunities offered by the mutable, unstable international situation in the Mediterranean area.

As far as the military policy is concerned, Libya will be forced, if the present economic difficulties persist, to reconsider and curtail its arms acquisition programs.

On the other hand, the European arms embargo will reduce the range of available options and, in the long-run, the lack of spare parts will have a negative effect on the efficiency of European weapons systems in service in the Libyan armed forces.



## FOOTNOTES

1. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, July 2-8, 1973, p. 25967. According to Libyan news reports, by the end of June, 1800 People's Committees had been established in all spheres of national life.

2. Nevertheless, in 1976 an editorial in a Libyan newspaper complained that the work force was composed of thousands of directors and supervisors and most of them in the public sector. See H.D. Nelson, ed., "Libya, a country study", Foreign Area Studies, The American University, Washington, 1979, p. 101.

3. The number of foreign workers in Libya in 1981 was estimated to be 500,000, with a Libyan population of just over three million people. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Sept. 3, 1982, p. 31681.

4. See J.A. Allan, ed. Libya since Independence, Croom Helm, London, 1982, p. 20 and 68-69.

5. The matter becomes complex and difficult mainly because of lack of reliable information. Libyan security problems and news regarding the armed forces are shrouded with the utmost secrecy. No publications deal with these problems on an overall basis and official sources are always very reserved about the matter. Journalistic reports do not exist and there are no interviews available with important exponents of the military establishment. Furthermore, since the middle of the 1970s, details of Libya's defense budget have no longer been disclosed.

6. Two new unsuccessful attempts to assassinate Qaddafi were reportedly carried out by dissident segments of the Libyan military in 1985. See International Herald Tribune, April 13-14, 1985.

7. Even more significant than budget figures are the quantities of materials purchased in that a part of arms imports were paid in oil supplies.

8. All figures relative to the Libyan armed forces are taken from The Military Balance by IISS of London, published annually.

9. In mid-1978, it was estimated that of the approximately 559,000 men between the ages of 15 and 49, approximately 327,000 were probably suitable to serve in the military. See H.D. Nelson, ed., op. cit., p. 252.

10. See Paul Balta, La Libye ou le defi permanent. Vers le "peuple en armes" Le Monde, Dec. 28-29, 1980.

11. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Sept. 1983, p. 32413.

12. See Middle East Economic digest, Dec. 17, 1982, p. 58.

13. Qaddafi's decision was officially approved at the GPC's meeting of March 1-2, 1979. See Keesing's Contemporary Archives, June 15, 1979, p. 29665.

14. See Middle East Economic Digest, April 29, 1983, p. 34.

15. Concerning the accusations against Libya of the governments of Dominica and Saint Lucia of having supplied opposition movements with money and terrorist training, see Keesing's Contemporary Archives, Vol. XXX, January 198, p. 32621.

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