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TWO UNCERTAIN FUTURES, LIBYA, TUNISIA AND THE UNPREDICTABILITY OF THE PREDICTABLE CHANGE

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean region is an area whose varied security parameters cannot be reconciled in a single strategic equation. Its politico-military factors differ drastically when one moves from the eastern to the western basin, from the northern to the southern shores.

The region is geostrategically, politically and ethnically fragmented, an area of countries with different international saliency, diverse foreign policy and divergent preferential external relations. It comprises members of the Atlantic Alliance and members of the non-aligned movement; countries tied to the Soviet Union by treaties of friendship and co-operation, and generically pro-Soviet countries, countries tied to the United States, and generically pro-Western countries. On the institutional plane, parliamentary democracies, costitutional monarchies, democratic popolar republics, socialist and presidential republics, and totalitarien regimes can all be found here. The region, and in particular its security and international relations aspects, can therefore only be analysed as a conglomerate of sub-areas - the Balkans, the Aegean Sea, the Middle East, the Mashrek and the Maghreb - each one with its own specific and peculiar features.

Overall, in the Mediterranean region there is substantial stability in East-West relations but a marked state of flux in North-South and South-South relations and the additional possibility of unstable internal developments in the North-African littoral countries. The most likely areas of potential crisis are all outside NATO's area of responsibility as established in the 1949 treaty. Hence although such crises could directly affect Western interests, the Atlantic Alliance as such does not provide the institutional and legal framework for a collective response. Nevertheless, the geostrategic fragmentation of the region, and of the various situations of potential crisis, does not exclude the possibility, should any crisis erupt into open conflict, that a larger area could be involved, with a higher number of international actors, including the two super-powers.

It is almost a truism to say that the Mediterranean is the region which has undergone the most dramatic strategic transformation in the last twenty years. The period has seen the final phase of de-colonization, the emergence of the Soviet Union as an assertive actor in the area - its foreign policy supported by a significant naval presence and by a widespread supply of armaments - the coming to power of revolutionary leaders, and the growth of international terrorism which finds immunity, political backing, training facilities and financial support in some of the littoral countries. This transformation has left open many difficult problems, It has not solved old

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political and territorial issues, while it has created further elements of controversy and tension. The endemic instability of the Mediterranean region is bound to persist and continue in the foreseable future, posing to the United States and the European countries complex problems which could require difficult and painful political and military choices.

This paper will assess briefly the present situation and future prospects of two North-African littoral countries, Tunisia and Lybia. Both exemplify the typical scenarios of potential internal instability. In addition, Libya is a country that projects instability outwards and supports revolutionary movements abroad (Tunisia being one of the targets of this policy). The main emphasis of the analysis will be on Libya whose role within and outside of the Mediterranean region poses the most intriguing and interesting questions.

TUNISIA AT THE BRINK

The Current Situation

Squeezed between two larger and more powerful neighbors, faced with deep economic and social problems, with roughly 60% of its population of seven million under 25 years of age, Tunisia appears to be living today in a state of uncertain waiting.

The ailing and aging President, Habib Bourguiba, no longer seems able to maintain his image as the charismatic leader, and the strong man capable of steering the country amid internal tensions and external threats. For many observers, his refusal to retire when poor health and age were reducing his ability to govern, sowed the seeds for a dramatic transition of power after his death. Moreover the recurring in-fighting and the events of the last two years - the ousting of the Premier Mohammed Mzali, the divorce of Bourguiba from his wife Wasilla, now living in exile in Paris, the dismissal of Habib Bourguiba jr. from his post as special advisor, the role played by his closest aides (in particular the newly appointed Director of the ministerial cabinet Amor Chadli), the important position assumed by Bourguiba's niece Saida Saissi - all pose disturbing questions about how many of the President's decisions are his own and how much are encouraged or manipulated by courtiers trying to get the upper hand in the succession game.

At the same time, the complexity of Tunisian society, and its apparent aspirations for change, have not yet been reflected politically in the composition of the Parliament. In fact, the decision of the few permitted opposition parties to boycott the November 1986 general election has resulted in the assignment of the 125 seats of the National Assembly to Bourguiba's Destourian Socialist Party. By contrast, the Islamic revival which came to the surface in 1977 and found its strongest political expression in the Mouvement de Tendance Islamique (Islamic Tendency Movement - ITM), has gradually gained ground, especially among students of Tunis University's law and science faculties, thus becoming the catalyst for violent confrontation between left-wing and Islamic militant students, the focus of Tunisian regime's repression drive and an important factor in the future domestic political developments of the country.

Political Prospects

There is no doubt that Bourguiba's death will bring change. The questions are: which direction will the change take, how profoundly will it affect the

political and social fabric of the country, and how and to what extent will it modify Tunis' international posture?

It seems inevitable that the post-Bourguiba period will produce a more open contest within the political system, with either the emergence of new political groups, the consolidation of those parties which until now have found limited scope for their activity, the eventual acceptance of the Islamic Tendency Movement as a legitimate contender in the Tunisian political arena, or any combination of these developments. The Moslem fundamentalists could try to establish an Islamic regime, playing on popular discontent over the bad economic situation and taking advantage of the extent to which democratic practices and institutions have been challenged and dismantled by Bourguiba in the last few years: the emasculation of the trade union movement, the limits to a truly indipendent press, the authorization of a pro-government organization to rival the decade-old Tunisian Human Rights League, and the humbling of the opposition parties.

The Tunisian armed forces will not necessarily remain aloof from internal developments in the succession period, in particular if these should appear to presage a change in the country's foreign policy and international alignment. However, even the armed forces are not immune from the growth of radical fundamentalism. Fundamentalist infiltration of the armed forces was reported in 1983 and in July 1986 four soldiers were sentenced to death for being involved in Islamic Jihad (1). These sentiments, which seem confined to the lowest ranks of the army, could play a role in a succession period marked by a forceful coming-out of the fundamentalist movement.

Other Influencing Factors

Four other economic and political factors will influence Tunisia's future. The first relates to the country's economic development. The Tunisian economy has been stagnating for several years. Prices have risen by 20-25% in the past two years but minimum guaranteed monthly salaries, frozen since 1983, were not raised until July 1986. Austerity has characterized the 1986 and 1987 budgets. The economic programme unveiled by premier Rachid Sfar in August 1986 (Among other measures the dinar was devaluated by 10 per cent) is bound to affect profoundly the life of Tunisians (2). The planned rationalization of internal demand is expected to bring progressive price liberation. Unless resulting increased prices of primary goods, are accompanied by higher consumer subsidies popular discontent is likely, with a good chance of repetition of the violent 1984 bread riots (3).

Unemployment will also have its bearing on social attitude and behaviour. The unemployment rate is around 25-30 per cent and every year only about 40.000 jobs are made available for the 70.000 young people joining the labour force (4).

Trends in other sectors will also influence Tunisian economy. Continued low oil prices will worsen the foreign exchange deficit, while in the longer term increasing domestic demand coupled with poor results in the research of new oil fields, could transform Tunisia, from an exporter to a net importer, thus posing additional economic problems. Economic improvement will also require an upturn in the tourism industry, positive trends in agricultural production, and continued or enhanced foreign aid in the form of economic support from the United States and the European countries (principally the EEC)(5).

The second factor is the strength and level of appeal possessed by the Islamic Tendency Movement, and by the type of religious fundamentalism it seeks

to promote.(6).The renaissance of Islamism in a country which had established a clear division between Church and State, and within a society which appeared substantially Westernized, is partly a product of an historical return to the importance of religion in life which is sweeping the entire Muslim world, partly a way of rejecting values, practices and customs foreign to the old Arab traditions, and partly the result - especially for the younger generations - of the declining appeal of ideologies such as nationalism, socialism and pan-Arabism.

Many observers tend to identify Tunisian fundamentalism as being substantially different from Iranian fundamentalism, pointing out, inter alia, that the people in Tunisia are Sunni. They consider the Mouvement de Tendence Islamique far more moderate and less inclined to consider faith and religion as basic elements on which to shape not only the internal, but also the international posture of the country. However, not everybody shares this optimistic view of an indigenous fundamentalist movement, willing to overturn the present institutional features of the State, but unwilling to reverse its international relations.There is a fear that the present Western-oriented Tunisia might turn into a radical Islamic country, thus drastically changing the political map of North-Africa as well as the geostrategic picture of the entire Mediterranean region. Whether such a possibility arises will depend crucially on the role of the security forces and the loyalty of the armed forces.

Equally, the course of events could be influenced and complicated by direct or indirect external interference or intervention by a neighboring country.It is difficult to envisage Algeria as the possible meddler in Tunisia's internal affairs, even though it would not, and could not, remain indifferent to Tunisian domestic developments contrary to its own security interests. A Libyan role aimed at destabilizing and weakening Tunis is more readily conceivable. Certainly, Qaddafi has not forgotten his rebuff when the 1974 Jerba agreement, which foresaw a union of Tunisia and Libya, was subsequently disavowed. Subsequent bilateral relations have ranged from the quasi-normal to very tense, culminating in a final break in 1985.when, following the expulsion of more than 30 thousand Tunisian workers from Libya, Tunis retaliated expelling 235 Libyans accused of spying; and requiring visas for all visiting Libyans. Libyan forces were then concentrated along the Tunisian border while Libyan aircraft penetrated Tunisian airspace. After two months of disputes, Tunisia, citing Libya's 'policy of aggression and permanent hostility' broke off relations with Tripoli (7).

Libya could provide arms and financial support to dissident groups in Tunisia. However, Gaddafi is not popular in Tunisia and it is hard to imagine that pro-Libyan factions could play any significant role in any eventual post-Bourgiba struggle for power. Moreover, it is difficult to see logical reasons for Gaddafi to help the emergence of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in Tunisia. Could the objective of enlarging the anti-Western and the anti-American front, and adding another country to the group which opposes any peace process in the Middle East, be important enough to accept the chance of fundamentalist winds sweeping also through Libya? Or might Tripoli's aim be only that of creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and concern, in order to weaken the Tunisian government and condition its foreign policy, in the event that Bourguiba's death does not substantially change the present political situation?

Obviously, Gaddafi would prefer a Tunisia aligned with his foreign policy positions and following his dream of pan-Arabic revolution and the precepts of his 'Green Book'. However, in assessing the range of possible actions vis-a-vis

Tunis in the post-Bourguiba period, Gaddafi would be forced to consider both the impact of an Islamic regime on his own fundamentalist opposition groups and the likely reactions of those countries, both within and outside the Mediterranean region, which would be unlikely to tolerate intrusive destabilization attempts, and even less any direct Libyan military intervention in Tunisia.

The fourth and final factor is represented by the attitude and measures the United States and the European countries would eventually adopt when confronted with developments in Tunisia that could result in an anti-Western oriented country, in particular if there was clear evidence of external meddling and/or an explicit request of support by the legal Tunisian government.

Pricipally as a result of former colonial ties and geographic contiguity, France and Italy are the two European countries with the closest relations with Tunisia. France has traditionally been Tunisia's close ally and in the past has clearly demonstrated concern for Tunisia's stability. In 1980, after the Southern Tunisian town of Gafsa was raided by Libyan-backed dissidents, Paris sent warships to the Gulf of Gabes to warn Libya and to show support for the Tunisian government. The military relationship is also close. France has supplied Tunisian armed forces with Exocet armed fast patrol craft, AMX-13 light tanks and Milan anti-tank missiles.

Italy, apart from selling weapons systems ranging from MB-326 close support and SF-260 training aircraft to AB-205 and AB-206 helicopters, maintains privileged economic ties with Tunis . Particular emphasis is given to the technical and economic assistance in agriculture, energy and the foodstuffs industry. Following a visit by Premier Craxi in December 1984, Tunisia has been accorded the highest political priority in the Italian aid for development programme.(8)

However, since Tunisian independence, a special political and economic relationship has developed with the United States. A Tunisian-American military commission has existed since 1981 with the task of addressing the different aspects of American military assistance. The U.S. is currently the most important supplier of armaments and economic aid; this year, notwithstanding cutbacks in the US foreign trade bill, Tunisia will receive $50 million - $30 million in military aid and the rest in cash.(9).

Europe and the United States have a clear interest in the stability, democratic progress and economic development of Tunisia and could react strongly to any attempt at subversion and destabilization conducted by Libya or any other country in the delicate period following Bourguiba's death. The form of any such reaction is however, uncertain .In case of internal subversion, instigated or indirectly supported by a foreign country, it would be difficult for the West to find ways of helping Tunis beyond the supply of armaments and special expertise similar to that provided by France to Saudi Arabia during the Mecca crisis. Strong diplomatic pressure could certainly be applied,and naval forces could be sent close to the Tunisian waters as a sign of support and as a deterrent to the threatening country. However it is hard to imagine the amphibious landing of U.S. or Italian Marines on Tunisian shores or the landing of French Foreign Legion units on Tunisian airfields unless the threat is clearly a military one and the Tunisian government asks explicitely for help.

Only a threatened or actual external aggression, coupled with an explicit request of support by the Tunisian government, would create a situation clearly justifying an American or European (probably French) military action.France has explicitly stated, as recently as April 1986, that it will be at Tunisia's side in the event of a Libyan threat. Equally during the Tunisia-Libya border crisis

of August 1985, the United States strongly reaffirmed the pledge of American support for Tunisia's security and territorial integrity.

Reaction to such a crisis would, however, face the West with difficult choices. The U.S. Congress, European Parliaments and public opinions in both continents would balk at a decision to intervene directly in a South-South bilateral confrontation, thus increasing the risk of an international crisis. The employment of military forces outside NATO's area of responsibility, in a role very different from that of peace-keeping, would pose an almost insuperable obstacle in particular to some European countries such as Italy. It would be even more difficult for the West to influence the dynamics of the domestic political struggle if no direct or indirect external intervention is evident, even in the very unlikely event that the legal Tunisian government, confronted with an uncontrollable, revolutionary domestic situation, should ask discreetely for help.

There are other potential actors. Egypt, a country that is both Arab and Mediterranean, and not subject to the same constraints as the West, is equally concerned about the Islamic fundamentalist movement becoming the winning force in Tunisia, and about potential Libyan subversive threats. Islamic fundamentalist sentiment is strong in Egypt and recent events have demonstrated its widespread diffusion. A radical Islamic Tunisia, especially if somewhat influenced by Libya, could prove to be an unacceptable threat to Mubarak. Egypt might provide some forms of support and this would be easier to accept by the Tunisian government than a clearly Western help. In such a case, the West could provide mainly diplomatic backing. At the same time, it is hard to believe that Algeria, which in 1983 signed a 20 year treaty of concord and fraternity with Tunisia would stand idle and assist without reacting to Libyan military moves against Tunisia.

The Future

Will the post-Bourguiba period be characterized by the violent instability that many fear? Will another Islamic fundamentalist regime appear, this time in the Mediterranean region? Or will the death of Tunisia's charismatic leader be followed by a period of political adjustment which will not alter the international posture of this strategically located Mediterranean country?

Yugoslavia has proved that charismatic leaders can pass without producing the disrupting effects feared, in particular if the succession has been carefully planned. Even though it would be wrong to equate the perspectives of post-Tito period with those of post-Bourguiba, considering the profound domestic political and social differences between the two countries, it should be noted that the mechanisms of succession have been formally established in Tunisia and that the armed forces appear intended to maintain the present international alignement. Furthermore, unlike Yugoslavia, a strong sentiment of national unity is present in Tunisia.

If the Tunisian government was capable of adopting badly-needed social reforms, and of providing an answer to the country's economic problems - two factors at the heart of Tunisian troubles - then the present malaise would fade out. The Islamic fundamentalist movement would lose many of its arguments against the regime and the transition of power would occur without dangerous domestic instability.

Perhaps, the future of Tunisia should be seen with a cautious optimism, instead of indulging in potentially self fulfilling prophecies. Any such optimism, however, is critically dependent on Western willingness to help the recovery of Tunisia's economy.

GADDAFI'S LIBYA

External Policy

Since 1969, Libya's foreign policy has moved along three main axes: pan-Arabism, that is the establishment of Arab unity; a broad anti-imperialism essentialy directed against the United States and its allies; and national security and national interests evaluated within the framework of the grand design and the encompassing doctrine laid down in Gaddafi's "Green Book".

Until 1973, pan-Arabism with a strong anti-Israel component seemed to be th main element of Libyan foreign policy. During that period Liby made many vain attempts to unite with other Arab countries, placing the destruction of the Jewish State as a pre-eminent and the aim of Arab unity. After the Yom Kippur war, while some Arab leaders were demostrating their willingness to search for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict - with an important role being played by the United States - Libya accentuated its "anti-imperialistic" (and therefore anti-American) policy and the transnational components of its revolutionary drive. This meant a foreign policy which, while retaining its bitter anti-Israeli colouring, assumed a more marked "expansionist" character. At the same time, agreement with Soviet international and, in particular, Middle East policy became more evident; political ties with Moscow were strengthened and arms delivery, initiated in 1970, intensified. Efforts to establish closer ties with anti-Western Islamic countries were pursued (for example the "political, military and economic cooperation" treaty signed with Ethiopia and South Yemen), together with more pragmatic, non-ideological attempts at union with Arab conservative countries (Tunisia in 1974 and Morocco in 1984).

The most recent period of Libyan foreign policy has been characterized, against a background of unrelenting anti-Israeli sentiment, by a more vocal and explicit support for the "revolutionary forces of the world", including Arab terrorist groups. This trend has been accompanied by a profound deterioration of the relationship with the United States and Western Europe, and by an expansion of the scope of the outward projection well beyond the regional confines of the Maghreb, central Africa and the Mediterranean. Today, Libya seems oriented to project its destabilizing initiatives as far as the Comoro Islands, Dominica and Santa Lucia, Mauritius and the South Pacific.

Gaddafi's ideology can only partially explain the course of Libyan foreign policy. Apart from an unchanging dedication to Arab unity - on Gaddafi's terms - Libyan foreign policy, rather than reflecting a coherent plan, often seems the result of an unprogrammed series of reactions aimed primarily at exploiting situations which it is assumed will eventually enhance the Libyan international image. In other words, Libya's foreign policy appears marked by the unpredictable attitudes and reactions of its leader, by ostentation and by a desire to be in the limelight of the international stage, and recognized as a country whose international initiatives must be reckoned with.

Gaddafi seems to be aiming at several objectives: One is to expand Libyan influence in the Third World and among the Arab countries, pretending to be the only true defender of the oppressed people and of the Arab cause; using the instruments of outright intervention (as in Chad), of covert subvertion (as in Niger and Sudan), and of financial support and military training to minority groups and extremist or terrorist movements fighting against legitimate

governments (the most recent examples being the contacts made and money and training provided to the Kanak independence movement in French New Caledonia, the Free Papua movement in Iran Jaya and the East Timor Liberation movement). He also seeks to substantiate the Libyan "anti-imperialist" credentials, performing the role of irritant to American and European interests in the world; to use foreign policy and international reactions to Libyan actions as a way to divert domestic attention from internal social and economic problems.

Judging only from its record as "trouble-maker", and from its attempts to subvert the international status quo, Libya may appear to have a coherent foreign policy. However its scope is far too large in relation to its real capabilities, and its results are limited, short-lived and heavily dependent on the indifference or complacency of the international community. When challenged, Libya has no choice but to accept the setback and adjust its foreign policy aims accordingly, albeit without renouncing them completely. As during the brief conflict with Egypt in 1977 and in Uganda in 1979, the March 1987 debacle in Chad has demostrated the fragility of the military arm which should support Libya's expansionist drive. However, if one assumes - as Qaddafi seems to do - that confrontation is equal to success, and that the hostility of the United States serves to increase Libya's significance, then even setbacks can be useful to rally international support, and to play the role of the victim, while internally they provide scope for capitalizing on the feeling of isolation and threat to unite the population behind the regime.

On the other hand, judging from the overall record of international initiatives, a certain incoherence is evident in Libyan foreign policy For example, the 25 June 1985 announcement that Libya would join Iran in the creation of an army to liberate Jerusalem and of an international revolutionary Islamic League - angered Baghdad, where only few days before Libya's foreign affairs minister had sought support for a pan-Arab union plan, and irritated Morocco which had concluded an Arab-African Union with Libya the year before. Again in 1985, the military pressure put on Tunisia annoyed Algeria, already irritated about the Morocco-Libya union treaty, and disputing with Tripoli over the common border in the Ghat region. In 1987, a new switch seemed to take place in the Libyan position vis-a-vis the Gulf war, with Tripoli moving closer to Iraq Eventually, diplomatic relations between the two countries were re-established in September 1987.

Military Capability

Gaddafi has dedicated huge amount of financial resources to the build up of Libyan military power. Defense budgets grew from $46 million in 1970 to $203 million in 1975 and to $709 million in 1982 (10). In the early 1980s, military spending was around 20% of the state budget. By the end of 1985 defense espenditures were estimated to be running at between $2 and $3 billion annually, unaffected by the cuts imposed on the Libyan economy by the drastic reduction of oil exports revenues.

Between 1970 and 1986, the armed forces increased from 15,000 to 71,500 men, with a further 40,000 strong People's Militia (11). The available manpower seems sufficient for the armed forces' requirements, but the level of "technical culture" of young trainees still appears inadequate for the technology of the weapons in Libyan arsenal. In the equipment field increases in the number of tanks and armored vehicles are of particular significance. There were 6 British Centurion medium tanks in 1970; today Libya deploys 2360 Soviet tanks (among them more than 150 very sophisticated T-72s) and 2,150 armored fighting vehicles, the majority of Soviet construction. The Libyan air

force deploys Tu-22 medium bombers and advanced fighters such as Mig-23, Mig-25 and Mirage F-1, while the navy possesses 6 Soviet Foxtrot class submarines and missile-armed corvettes and fast patrol craft. The missile inventory includes SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, SA-8, and 3 brigades of SA-5 (for which Libya was only the second non-Warsaw pact recipient) plus FROG-7 and SCUD-B surface-to-surface missiles (12). Overall, the Soviet Union remains Libya's main supplier of armaments, but Tripoli has also acquired weapons systems from France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Brazil.

Today, even allowing for the fact that some armaments - including 1200 tanks and 450 aircraft - are reportedly held in storage, the quantity of Libya's weapon systems far exceeds its defence requirements, while their sophistication poses problems of maintenance and logistic support requiring the assistance of foreign advisors and technicians. Foreign military personnel present in Libya include Russians, East Europeans, Syrians (Syrian pilots reportedly fly Libyan aircraft), Pakistanis, North Koreans and Palestinians. Apart from the Soviet Union, military training and technical assistance has been provided in the past by France, Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom, Swedom and Yugoslavia.

The operational readiness of the Libyan armed forces, and their fighting potential in terms of training and morale, are generally regarded as poor. Reports on the latest Libyan military clashes with the Unites States in the Mediterranean, and with the Habre's forces in Chad, confirms the low level of combat capability. The debacle in Chad indicated inadequate military planning and scanty fighting will. The confrontations with the American forces - even allowing for overhelming American superiority - again showed poor tactics and training (Libyan fighters flew.at night only in the vicinity of their airfields), a lack of interservice operational co-ordination, and an insifficient defense capability. During the "freedom of navigation" operations conducted by the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean from January through March 1986, the Libyan air force flew 60 to 90 daily sorties in January, and more than 100 sorties in a three-day period in February (13). However, after the March shooting (14) no Libyan military aircraft ventured again out to sea. Equally, in spite of the high quantity and quality of the air defense system's assets, the reaction to the American 15 April air raid on Tripoli and Benghazi was characterized by disorganization and poor performance.

In sum, Libyan armed forces apperar to suffer from the malaise typical of many Third World countries: a huge inventory of modern and advanced weapons systems not matched by an operational capacity to employ them in a conflict to the best of their performance, or the technical skill to maintain them ready for combat without extensive foreign suppport. However, even though they seem incapable of truly waging war against Western or Arab countries in the Mediterranean region (only Tunisia could really be threatened) Libyan armed forces cannot be altogether discarded as a potential threat. They have the capability to carry out a Chad-type campaign, and to conduct a surprise, limited hit-and-run air and/or naval operation, even far from Libyan territory. Given that it is difficult to deter or compel Gaddafi, as the entire course of the 1986 American-Libyan confrontation has shown, than even these possible forms of aggression appear credible enough threats to justify concern in crisis circumstances.

The relationship between Gaddafi and the armed forces is marked by a degree of reciprocal frustration, suspicion and distrust. On the one hand, the armed forces have been put under pressure by the intrusive control exercised upon their operations by the Revolutionary Committees; by the purges of army officers since the Mahaishi attempted coup in August 1975; by press accusations

of corruption, nepotism, and anti-rivolutionary activity; by their announced, but not yet implemented, transformation into a people's army (15); and by a foreign policy which imposes upon them tasks superior to their capabilities. On the other hand, Gaddafi, while willing to spend the money necessary to buy the best weapons the international market can offer, is aware that only the military could threaten his power and that recent years have seen alleged mutinies, defections and many attempted coups by elements of the armed forces.

His central problem is to balance his need for the armed forces to pursue his international goals and the price he is willing to pay in terms of his own security. Well equipped armed forces with a high level of combat capability would constitute a better tool in support of Libya's foreign policy but, if sufficiently united, could also represent a more concrete threat to the present leadership. On the other hand, if Gaddafi's main international aims are indirect subversion, financial support to "revolutionary" movements, and covert attempts to undermine the governments of pro-Western Arab countries, then the role of the armed forces is less important, and Gaddafi's "divide et impera" rule, would maintain the essential elements of a military posture while preventing the creation of a strong military opposition.

Social Conditions

To judge the status of the fabric of Libyan society today is not an easy task. The impression given is of a divided society; politically lethargic, and only superficially supportive of Gaddafi's revolutionary ideology. Expectations of progress and affluence have been dashed by the reality of economic stagnation. Some small business sectors of society appear frustrated and highly critical of the radical nationalization and socialization measures which deprived them of their incomes. There is public discontent over the activity of the Revolutionary Committees created by Gaddafi because of their intrusive way of performing their role and exercising their control. Finally, the country is to a large degree still dependent on foreign manpower, suffers agitation by Islamic fundamentalist groups opposing the regime, has an industrial base close to collapse (16) and is facing gloomy agricultural prospects for the 1990s (17).

The economic trend is the central factor. Oil export revenues, which play a decisive role, have declined from $20 billion in 1980 to around $4 billion in 1986. There are other economic shortcomings, some of which the March 1987 General People's Congress, and Gaddafi himself, have for the first time openly admitted. The abolition of private commerce has not worked well. Foreign debt has reached sizable proportions while trade with OECD countries has shrunk (19). Overall, The share of 1987 budget funds allocated for development has been cut by 15 per cent compared to 1986 (20).

Qaddafi knows that to stem domestic criticism and regain support for his regime, he has to find a way of reversing the negative trends in the Libyan economy, despite low oil export incomes. His March 1987 speech appeared to indicate awareness of the necessity for economic reform and pointed towards a more market-oriented policy. It is difficult to predict if, how, and when these measures will be actually applied, even though it seems evident that Gaddafi's survival depends among other factors on the return of Libyan society to the standard of living of the golden years of the oil price boom.

Relations With the Eastern Bloc

The relationship between Libya and the East European countries, in particular between Libya and the Soviet Union, still plays a fundamental role in Tripoli's foreign and military policy. The links are more direct and evident on the military field than on the diplomatic and political level. A French study has detailed the number and the tasks of Warsaw Pact military advisors and instructors operating in Libya. According to editor Jacques de Lestapis, while the 3.500 Soviets are present in all military services, 1,200 East Europeans concentrate on specific sectors: East Germans take care of the Libyan internal security apparatus and of intelligence gathering; Czechs specialize in supporting the Libyan air force and army armored units; Poles advise and instruct the navy; Hungarians are active in air defense, communications and electronics; Bulgarians provide their expertise to the ground forces (21). However, the strongest links are with the Soviet Union, the prime suplier of armaments, many of them technologically advanced and not yet provided to Warsaw Pact allies.

In 1986, during the American-Libyan confrontation, the USSR reportedly provided Libya with data on Sixth Fleet relayed from Soviet ships shadowing American units. However, throughout the confrontation, Soviet action was very circumspect and designed to avoid any confrontation with the US forces (22).

Several reasons underly the close military relationship between the Soviet Union and Libya. Geostrategically, the position of Libya makes it an ideal platform for the control of the Central Mediterranean. In peacetime, or in a situation of East-West crisis, the possibility for Soviet air and naval forces to use Libyan military facilities would greatly enhance their flexibility of operational employment. This would be particularly the case in the event of a NATO-Warsaw Pact military confrontation in the Mediterranean, when the anchorages currently used would be inadequate to satisfy the war requirements of the Soviet Mediterranean Fleet. In fact, although it cannot be said that the Soviets have exclusive basing rights in Libya, they retain some port and naval-air facilities in Tripoli, Tobruk and Benghazi. It has also been argued that the huge inventory of tanks and armoured vehicles sold to Libya amount essentially to a pre-positioning of hard-to-ship armaments which could be utilized by Soviet forces in a crisis (24). The same can be said for the delivery of advanced combat aircraft. Moreover, in 1986, the Soviets increased their naval-air presence in Libya, with six deployments of Il-38 maritime patrol aircraft for an average stay of 37 days (23). Periodic joint military manoeuvres (three Soviet-Libyan naval-air exercises took place in 1985) familiarize Soviet air force and navy personnel with the Mediterranean environment. Thus, Libyan friendship is essential for the fulfilment of the Soviet Union's military requirements within the framework of its Mediterranean policy vis-a-vis the United States.

But there are also political reasons. For the Soviet Union to be the main supplier of training and armaments and spare parts to Libya means to create a certain degree of dependence on the part of the latter. Tripoli's military power and the level of efficiency of its armed forces will largely rest on the willingness of Moscow to continue military assistance. This dependence is bound to provide political dividends for the Soviet Union, since it could be used to influence the course of the Soviet bilateral relationship with Tripoli and, to a certain extent, Gaddafi's foreign policy. However, Soviet willingness to be Libya's arms shop is not unlimited. There have been refusals to provide certain types of weapons systems the Soviet Union judged to be too sophisticated or too destabilizing and, more recently (and contrary to past experience), even a reported resistence to replacing the equipment and the weapons lost in the defeat suffered in Chad (25). The Libyan debt to Moscow, estimated to be more

than $5 billion (26), is certainly a reason, but not the only one, for Soviet reluctance.

Soviet caution has been even more evident in the diplomatic field. Moscow has stalled a Libyan request for a treaty of friendship and cooperation similar to that signed with Syria, has not taken seriously Gaddafi's declared willingness to have Libya join the Warsaw Pact, and has always refrained from establishing too tight military and political links as could eventually involve it in a confrontation with the United States. The Soviets appear weary of Gaddafi's unpredictability in foreign policy, of Libya's alleged role in sponsoring international terrorism, of its substantial isolation in the Arab world and in the non-aligned movement.

Overall, it appears that the Soviet Union views its relations with Libya as a tactical necessity (provided that the political price is not too high). In order to gain those limited military advantages in the Mediterranean which Gaddafi is willing to offer. On the other hand, relations with the Soviet Union - which, for Gaddafi, is an atheist, ideologically removed and basically imperialistic country -appear to be central for Libya in the context of Gaddafi's fundamental foreign policy objectives. It seems conceivable that the new Soviet Middle East policy taking shape under Gorbachev, and characterised by a greater degree of pragmatism, will affect Soviet-Libyan relations. Perhaps, even more than in the past, the Soviet Union will try to reap the maximum benefits from the relationship, while at the same time keeping Gaddafi at arm's length.

Relations with the West

Western (American and European) relationships with Gaddafi's Libya could be defined as an unusual mixture of political opportunism, economic ploys, personal distaste, allegations and accusations, threats and military confrontations. The Reagan Administration's policy towards Libya appears clear. Libya is an "outlaw" State, its role as supporter and sponsor of international terrorism fully proven, its military links with the Soviet Union well-established, its anti-American bias so profound and its anti-American activities so blatant that any type of relation would be illogical, unsound and immoral. Libya's international behaviour must be checked and if necessary punished, to show American resolve and determination and as a deterrent for other countries. The economic sanctions, the vertical drop in the level of trade (exports dropped from $311 million in 1985 to $46 million in 1986, while in the same period imports were reduced from $47 million to $1,6 million (27)) the Presidential order to all American enterprises and citizens to leave Libya, the naval exercises outside and inside the Sidra Gulf which Libya claims as its territorial waters, the April 1986 air raid, are all events to be viewed and interpreted in the light of that policy. Its wisdom and morality have been questioned in the United States and abroad in many respects, in particular as regards its effectiveness in stemming Gaddafi's adventurism and in weakening his regime. At the same time, press reports on the "disinformation campaign", and on the real targets of the F-111 air raid (28), were giving a disturbing picture, expecially when connected with the later scandal of the Iran-Contra affair, of how foreign policy was conducted in the Reagan Administration.

The Western European countries' attitudes and policies towards Libya have been, and partly still are, different from those of the United States, more varied, more directly influenced by economic factors and conditioned by domestic factors, and sometimes contradictory and ambiguous. For the Europeans

the first conditioning element is their energy dependence on Arab States. Oil considerations have played a special role in determining policy towards Libya, in particular in the cases of West Germany, Italy and France. The situation today is very different from that of the seventies when the 1973 and 1979 oil shocks exposed European vulnerability in sharp terms. Oil imports, however, are still fundamental for European economies. Foreign policy initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa are still evaluated by each European country against its specific economic interests, and on the basis of how they might disrupt oil trade. Furthermore, many European countries are still trading with Libya, even though at a reduced level (although UK exports grew from 237 million pounds in 1985 to 260 million pounds in 1986 (29) and are involved in industrial projects in Libya, and have workers operating there (around three thousand in Italy's case), all potential hostages in case of crisis. Finally, European governments differ from the American Administration on their evaluation of the Libyan role in international terrorism and on the definition of policies and tactics which should be adopted to confront it.

France, in the past the second most important supplier of armaments to Libya, has clearly demonstrated since the Gafsa episode in 1980 its unwillingness to accept Qaddafi's destabilizing and expansionist policy in North and Central Africa. However, France has also shown a tendency to seek diplomatic solutions before providing military support to its African friends. The meeting between Gaddafi and French President Mitterand in Crete in November 1984 is a clear case in point.

Italy's attitude has always been ambivalent: willing to follow the tough American stance against international terrorism but not to the point of jeopardizing its many and diversified economic interests in Libya. Feeling more vulnerable than any other European country to any Mediterranean crisis or Libyan-American confrontation - a feeling strengthened by the two Libyan missiles launched against Lampedusa - Italy has sought to use a subtle diplomatic approach. There have been no attempts to demonize Gaddafi, but reiterated assertions that military actions were unjustified, and in any case unsuitable as a tool to fight international terrorism. There has also been a constant search for diplomatic solutions and for a crisis-cooling approach aimed at avoiding drastic measures such as full economic sanctions or a break in diplomatic relations. At the same time, there has also been enough of a show of determination (the explicit declarations that another attack, after Lampedusa, would receive a military response), along with the steps taken within the framework of EC decisions (the reduction of Libyan diplomatic representation in Italy and the expulsion of Libyan citizens), to avoid the appearance of weakness and unresponsiveness to the American call for coordinated actions. This policy has been in line with Italy's overall Mediterranean policy aimed at presenting itself as a friend to everybody and enemy to none, as a mediator between North and South, and as a country willing to take its responsibility for the maintainance of peace and stablity in the region, demonstrated by the participation in Sinai and Lebanon international forces.

On the whole, the European countries think that Libya is more a political than a military problem, and that overstressing its international role and importance is counter-productive and bound to feed Qaddafi's already oversized ego. The Europeans are cautions about safeguarding their commercial interests, skeptical about the allegations that Tripoli in behind every terrorist action in Europe, critical about the employment of military force, and tend to put their relations with Libya in a longer term perspective, i.e. with a view to a

post-Qaddafi period. But the European countries' attitude is also the result of their inter-relationship within the EC framework and of their relations with the United States in the framework of the Atlantic Alliance. This explains the compromise evident in the wording of the final communique' of the 14 April 1986 EC Foreign Affairs ministers meeting, even though it finally mentioned Libya, the unwillingness to impose full economic sanctions, the French refusal of over flight rights for the American F-111 aircraft inbound to Libya, and the negative reactions to the American air raid. But it explains also Mrs. Thatcher's permission to use British airbases for the American bombing mission, the consensus reached on the issue of international terrorism at the Summit of the Seven in Tokyo (May 1986) - where Libya was explicitly mentioned in the final document - and the stronger French attitude in dealing with the Libyans in Chad in the last part of 1986 and in January and February 1987.

The Leadership

After the American air attack, there were rumors about a shift at the top of the Libyan regime whereby Gaddafi, profoudly shocked by the raid, had lost part of this power to a five-man junta. Within this new collective leadership, reportedly controlled by Gen. Makhail Bakov, head of the Soviet KGB in Libya, a special role was said to be assumed by Major Abdel-Salam Jallud, the "Number Two" in Libyan hierarchy, considered to favor stronger ties with Moscow. There is no doubt that Gaddafi, who is known to suffer from depression, was severely affected by the American bombing, and this partly explains his month-long disappearance from public view. However, since his late June 1986 interview with UPI reporter Marie Colvin, Gaddafi has shown not only to have fully recuperated but also to be in full control. The collegiality which seemed to emerge after the attack has been pushed again in the background.

Ousting Gaddafi is certainly a target of American policy, and the not too secret hope of many Western and Arab countries. It is, however, uncertain what forces inside and outside of Libya would be capable of conducting a successful coup. Libyan society is fragmented and the Libyan people, though disillusioned by the regime's revolutionary achievements, and suffering from serious economic crisis, appear politically apathetic. Apart from the armed forces, the Revolutionary Committee system and the tribal alliances, there are no other real centers of power, nor any charismatic figure capable of uniting opposition to Gaddafi. The military is both the ultimate guarantor of Qaddafi's power and the most credible threat to his tenure. Having come to power through the army, Qaddafi is fully aware of this potential challenge and has taken the appropriate measures, ranging from the role played by the East Germany's trained security forces, to the control imposed upon the military by the Revolutionary Committees, to the presidential guards drawn from his own tribe, the Qadhadhfa, to the special battalion formed to crush any coup attempt.

There are opposition groupings in exile (30): the Libyan Democratic Party (known earlier as the Libyan National Democratic Mouvement) founded in 1977 by Fadil Masudi, a journalist; the Libyan National Grouping (LNG) an alliance of Ba'athists and Arab socialists founded in 1978 by Mahmud Maghribi, former Libyan ambassador to Great Britain; and the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL) formed in 1981 by Muhammad Magharif, former ambassador to India. Smaller groupings such as the pro-monarchist Libyan Constitutional Union, the right-wing Libyan Liberation Organization and the Libyan National Salvation Committee also emerged in the 1980's. However, these opposition groupings are still too fragmented and disunited in their immediate and long term objectives, and they do not appear to possess any widespread appeal inside of Libya or a strong backing from the armed forces.

If it were ever to happen, Gaddafi's ousting would be probably the result of a "palace conspiracy" conducted by men in key positions at the regime's top, or, even more likely, a military coalition directed by officers capable of controlling the most combat-ready units of the Libyan army and air force, with the support of middle grade cadres. Leaders might come from the former Revolutionary Command Council, or be some of those who helped Gaddafi to carry out the 1969 revolution, or some within his family background. In any case, the task is going to be very hard, and the risks very high, as the many attempted and failed coups (three reportedly took place in 1985 and two allegedly were attempted in 1986) have amply demonstrated.

Possibilities and Prospects

It has been argued that the possibility of internal conflict following Gaddafi's removal is extremely high, with competition among the three previously-mentioned power centers - but with the military being the real masters of the game - and the potential resurfacing of traditional rivalries between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania (31). it is difficult to predict what kind of regime will rule Libya in a post-Gaddafi era. It is conceivable that the new leader will adopt less radical domestic and foreign polices, even though it is unlikely that Qaddafi's revolutionary imprint would be totally erased. However, it is far from certain that Libya's international posture will eventually change, with a shift in alliances similar to that of Egypt under Sadat.

Questions remain open on the role that Islamic fundamentalism would play in the post-Gaddafi reshuffle for power, on the capability of the exile groupings to influence Libyan internal developments, on the attitudes of the Soviet Union and Western countries and, last but not least, on the reactions of Arab countries, in particular Egypt and Algeria, to a change of leadership in Libya. The European countries,- perhaps unlike the United States,- will be more-than-happy if the change in Libya would permit the re-establishment of normal relations, conducive to an increase in economic transactions, even though Libya's international alignment were to remain the same. The Soviet Union will be in a good position to protect and support its favourites, and very likely conduct at least a damage control policy with the aim of not losing an important ally in the Central Mediterranean - an ally which under the new leadership could become less radical and unpredictable, and then less difficult to deal with and more valuable in military terms.

The Arab countries, even those closest to Libya's international policy and anti-Western stance, would regard Gaddafi's departure with little concern, if not outright pleasure. The impression is that of Libya's substantial isolation the Arab world, reinforced by Gaddafi's refusal to participate in the January 1987 Islamic Summit Conference in Kuwait and by the fact that, contrary to the past, Iran and Syria did not sent their delegations to the annual Libyan General People's Congress held in Sebha at the end of February. This impression was not completely dispelled by Gaddafi's visit to Algeria in June reportedly to discuss Libya's call for a political merger between the two countries.

Algeria, which wants to play a special role in regional security, might be tempted to seek somewhat the final outcome of a post-Gaddafi fight for power. Egypt too could be tempted to intervene just to be sure that the "new" Libya would adopt a more friendly attitude. However, any leader who will try to accede to power with the help of a foreign country, even though Arab, is very likely to be rejected by Libyan people for lack of a real national legitimacy. The national pride of the Libyans is an element whose role should not be underestimated in the context of a change in the present regime.

In conclusion, the public discontent ever the economic situation and the role of the Revolutionary Committees, the weakened tribal support base, and the increased frustration of the Libyan military, are all elements which taken individually are not posing any real danger to Gaddafi's tenure. Taken together, however, they could threaten his power in the longer run if no measures are adopted to address the country's social and economic problems. However, the Colonel appears today - September 1987 - fully in control of his country, capable of defending its regime and more-than-willing to continue his traditional policies and pursue his political and socio-economic dreams.

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