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Reports

The Arab World and Africa after Gaddafi: An Arab Point of View

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The assumption that very few would mourn the death of Libya's Gaddafi at least strengthens the leaders of the revolution while burying the "King of Kings" of Africa in the desert in an unmarked grave. However, the picture is not completely as such for in Africa there are thousands of elite, politicians and even ordinary citizens who look to Gaddafi with admiration and reverence, and even consider his killing as an inhumane act against a leader who was able, thanks to the power of money and extensive relationships, to enter into the heart of Africa.

Nevertheless, it is worth wondering why Africans mourned the death of Gaddafi in particular and not other leaders of the Arab and Islamic worlds, and what the prospects are for relations between Gaddafi's Africa and the revolution regime in Tripoli, as well as whether there is a possibility of new Arab-African relations?

Towards Africa

From his ascension to power forty two years ago to his demise, Gaddafi was a prominent element in the African scene in various ways, combining military intervention, political dispensation and financial seduction whereby he was able to occupy his position, which was eminent in the sight of Africans. However, his obsession with leadership and his earnest quest to expand the circle of his dominion were not the sole enhancers of his leadership. He made use of international factors and circumstances that include the following:

- **Absence of serious Arab or Islamic attention to Africa**
Since the demise of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, Africa has lagged behind in the circle of Arab interests; thus, Gaddafi, considering himself Abdel Nasser's successor, took the opportunity and advanced deeply into Africa.
- **Absence of charismatic grassroot African leaders with political ambition based on economic power**
While the two abovementioned factors framed the many years of Gaddafi's aspiration to leadership, there are two more that accelerated and consolidated Gaddafi's pace towards Africa, namely:
- **Tensions in Libyan-Arab relations in particular, and the apparent abandonment of Gaddafi by the Arabs during the political embargo his regime faced**
Since he walked out of Arab League meetings and lashed at the Arabs with scathing criticism, there was nowhere for the colonel to resort to in order to exercise his pursuit of leadership other than Africa.
- **Demolition of the dream of a Libyan military force after the submission of Gaddafi's nuclear arsenal to the West, and the normalisation of relations with the United States and the European Union as part of succumbing to Western demands**

With the combination of these factors, Gaddafi's vision of Africa was established. His ambitions then started off by combining the might of war, military power, financial seduction and economic support.

Africans who found themselves face-to-face with Gaddafi and his financial and economic lures managed the relationship with much suspicion, sophistication and, finally, pragmatism. They exploited Gaddafi's generosity politically and economically in order to allow him to obtain leadership and titles of African glory.

Furthermore, large segments of suppressed African societies looked at Gaddafi's anti-Western slogans and glorification of the rhetoric of African unity with admiration. This was in addition to his effective quality of attracting religious and political leaders in Africa

through gifts and generous gestures he had showered Africans with for more than three decades.

In fact, Gaddafi found in Africa what he had failed to receive from Arab and international communities in terms of support for his policies during difficult circumstances. Reciprocally, Africans also found in the Libyan colonel what they had perpetually lacked in the Arab world in terms of economic and political support since in Africa he who supports infrastructure and provides loans and support to local leadership receives much respect.

The Journey of War and Money

The picture becomes clearer with the restoration of Libyan-African relations in the last four decades; and it can be said that Africa has been a cornerstone in the colonel's diary of concerns given that he had tried in his first twenty years to impose his presence by use of armed force, agitation of political unrest and support of armed rebel movements in more than one African country:

In Chad, the closest neighbour to Libya, Gaddafi was the most prominent factor in the political crises and civil wars the country had been experiencing since independence. The break off in relations between the two countries for a mere two years after the arrival of Gaddafi to power was not enough to stop his intervention in the internal affairs of N'djamena as he remained a key supporter of the parties in the civil war because of his unstable temperament. His announcement of full integration between the two countries in 1981 sparked an outrage in Africa. He consequently had to quickly announce disengagement with Chad while maintaining the occupation of Ozu territory until 1994 when the International Court of Justice ruled in favour of Chad.

In Ethiopia, Colonel Gaddafi contributed strongly to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 in support of his successor, Marxist-oriented Mengistu Haile Mariam – because of the fact that both were hostile towards U.S. imperialism – as well as the rebel Sudan Liberation Movement (SPLA/M) in south Sudan. By the end of the eighties, Gaddafi had sent more than one hundred million dollars of military aid to Ethiopia in the face of the mounting Eritrean revolution before the relationship between the parties came to an end after Ethiopia's restoration of relations Israel.

Gaddafi redirected his support to independent Eritrea, which benefited a great deal from Libyan generosity, in areas of mining, maritime economy and oil in addition to permanent political support for the Afwerki regime, which remained Tripoli's permanent guest before the announcement of the translation of the Green Book into the Eritrean language in 2006, in pursuit of globalising the ideology of revolutionary committees.

In Liberia, Gaddafi strongly supported the militias of former president Charles Taylor, for the latter to end up a prisoner at the International Court of Justice.

In the Central African Republic, dictator Jean-Paul Bokassa received strong support from Gaddafi, prompting him to embrace Islam after several months although he was accused of cannibalism among other charges of genocide.

In Mali, Gaddafi was a key supporter of tension and military rebellion against the government of Bamako for years before later becoming a key supporter of development in the impoverished country. Similarly, the stability or unrest in the Malian Ozoad zone, where Arab and Tuareg tribes live, has been a main indicator in understanding the relationship between Bamako and Tripoli. After Gaddafi's fall, the government of Bamako did not know which man to back and has yet to recognize the Libyan National Transitional Council. However, it has now begun to pay the price for the fall of Gaddafi who had been a main supporter of its fragile economy. For example, the price of oil has strongly risen in Mali since the interruption of Libyan oil in the beginning of the revolution. Also, the north of Mali has received hundreds of members of Tuareg tribes

returning from Libya with large amounts of ammunition potentially with political aspirations for establishing an independent state.

In Sudan, the relationship between Gaddafi and successive regimes in Khartoum has been characterised by a lot of tension. In the era of President Jaafar Nimeiri, Gaddafi turned from a close friend of the Sudanese regime, which had enabled him to take revenge from a number of political opponents, to a staunch opponent who attempted to assassinate Nimeiri more than once. Perhaps the statement of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir weeks ago that "the rebels in Misrata who moved with Sudanese weapons in order to avenge Gaddafi were responsible for the unrest in Sudan and the attacks on Omdurman and Khartoum," may give an accurate overview of relations between the two countries.

However, Gaddafi's funds have been more fluid and effective with the establishment of the African Union, which he sponsored and maintained throughout the years of his reign, paying financial obligations owed by many poor African countries to the African Union. Later, he had established the Libyan-African Company whose investments covered many African countries including Gabon, Congo, Burkina-Faso, Niger, Mali, Guinea, Chad, Uganda, Benin, Liberia, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Central Africa, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Rwanda, Gambia, Ghana, Togo, Comoros, DR Congo and Mauritania (in which Gaddafi announced a series of economic projects with a budget of up to \$ 500 million). He also saved the Mauritanian regime from a constitutional crisis of legitimacy after the military coup led by current President General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz against the president-elect, Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi on 6th August 2008.

Africa's Tears

With the death of Colonel Gaddafi, Africans have lost a strong supporter who deserves sorrow and tribute. Therefore, in many African countries, political governments and regimes, elites, and political and religious leaderships have expressed their contempt over the death of Gaddafi. For example, in Senegal, the first African country to support the Libyan revolution, religious leader and President of the National Front Coalition Party, Ahmed Khalifa Agnès, regarded the death of Gaddafi as a loss for Africa and for the African Union in particular. He also pointed out in an interview with local DSTV that "Gaddafi was not only the greatest defender of Africans in the international arena, but also a provider of generous assistance to Africa."

The Senegalese politician also regarded what happened in Libya as being neo-colonialism because the powers (Britain, France and Italy) whose strikes overthrew Gaddafi are the very powers that had colonised Libya before and now want to recolonise it.

As mentioned above, Mali has not recognised the transitional council although it has allowed the flying of its flag over the Libyan Embassy in Bamako. In addition, many segments of Malian society feel sorry for Gaddafi's murder as the financial newspaper Cyber Press quoted a Mali citizen as saying: "They killed our friend, Gaddafi, for his oil. He was [sic] a great man who had given the Africans generously."

In Niger, local leaders have quickly threatened the central government with retaliation if it dares to hand over Gaddafi's son to his opponents in the Transitional Council in Tripoli. This corresponds perfectly to what the New York Times has described as being "deep sorrow" in sub-Saharan Africa after the death of Gaddafi.

Following the murder of Gaddafi, the media revealed more than one sad statement by leaders and diplomats in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Niger over his killing and burial deep into the desert. His strategic ally, Eritrea, expressed its strong resentment towards his death, and during the period of the Libyan revolution, Isaias Afewerki made angry statements against the rebels.

Although Africa felt the deepest sorrow over the incident and is trying to heal its many wounds, it is certain that the tears it shed for Gaddafi were not crocodile tears but a

genuine expression of the loss of a key supporter for the African cause and a key element in the African political scene.

Africa and the Libyan Revolution

The Libyan revolution has wiped out all the previous political terminology in Libyan records. While re-establishing itself as a new entity, today's Libya is no longer that of Gaddafi. This implies that many strategic and political variables will affect the relationship between Libya and the African continent including:

- Libya's return to the fold of the Arab world and the international community, represented by the United States and the European Union, which entails strengthening relations with the "Liberation Forces"; and this policy shall be the main priority of the new leaders in Tripoli. This further entails that Libya would be obliged to establish exceptional relations with the Western camp, which has long been described as imperial and a brutal enemy during some periods of Gaddafi's reign.
- The efforts of the revolutionary regime to reconstruct Libya, involving high economic costs and global relations, will make Libyans focus primarily on the sources of support and funding and development funds. Also, maintaining existing resources in Libya will take priority over lost resources in Africa, which implies that Tripoli's treasuries are no longer open to Africans.

Another key factor shall be added to the above-mentioned, namely is the sensitivity of the Libyans towards Africans in particular as African mercenaries have been charged for massacring rebels and civilians, and extending the life of Gaddafi's regime, in turn rendering African labour unwelcomed in the new Libya.

As for the Africans, there is no doubt that the leaderships that long benefited from Libyan funds will experience the following:

- A major threat to their faltering economy as well as to the survival of many regimes in the region that have long depended on Libyan funds and support. With the absence of financial support and political assistance, nothing will tempt the Africans to quickly normalise relations with the transitional council. Moreover, neighbouring African countries can soundly contribute to jeopardising the political and social setting of post-revolution Libya given that the communities of these countries in Libya were granted citizenship during Gaddafi's reign.

This requires political wisdom and strong management of relations with Africa, excluding the option of hostility. Relations between Libya and the African continent can be re-read on the basis of common interests and political peerage.

In any case, the stability of large parts of the African continent is linked to the stability of Libya; and any state of unrest in the new political regime will necessarily turn neighbouring countries into volatile fronts for anticipated political parties in Libya. Moreover, with the profusion and proliferation of arms in Libya and the multiplicity of causes of unrest among the revolution's components, many parties within the African continent will be interested in the stability of new Libya, particularly Sudan, Chad, Niger, Mali and Algeria.

Towards Arab Understanding of Africa

With the death of Gaddafi, an interesting page in Arab-African relations has been turned. It was marred by much turmoil and hostility at some points while characterised by intimacy and conformity in later stages. Certainly, Africa still represents, despite its economic weakness and the dispersion of its political decisions, a strategic power to the

Arab world and a semi-permanent ally in Arab and Islamic issues, which requires a new policy based on:

- Activating of cultural ties between Africa and the Arab world through Islam, to which millions of Africans adhere and which had been one of Gaddafi's most important access points into the hearts of the Africans, as his collective prayers and the various mosques he built in African countries were the means through which he convinced the Muslims of Africa that he was a "Muslim revolutionary" who annually received thousands of African Muslims that had converted to Islam in return for gifts and bounties.
- Promoting a regional alliance between Africa and the Arab world through organisations such as the Arab Maghreb Union organization, enhancing Arab presence in the African Union, and activating effective cooperation between the Arab League and African Union organizations.
- Rediscovering Africa with its rich economic resources and potential fields of investment in a way that positively impacts African resolutions whose first and main entry is economy.
- Supporting African issues in the international system and assisting Africans in their quest for democracy and economic development in a way that allows African allegiance to Arab interests based on values of democracy, coexistence and freedom rather than dictatorship, unrest and inept Arab political decisions that marred past decades.

Whatever the prospects of the Arab-African relationship may be, Gaddafi's death has undoubtedly turned an interesting page in the history of Arab-African relations, a page with an unstable course featuring the aspirations of a revolutionary leader with unlimited ambitions.

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