



Libya Uprising

The African Union Democracy Blue-Print and the Future of Gaddafi's Power

Africa Brief

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Executive Summary

The protest in Libya, which started on 14 February 2011 when opponents of Muammar Gaddafi's government called for the "Day of Rage" as part of the larger protests sweeping North Africa and the Middle East, has rapidly degenerated into a low intensity civil war. But the removal of Gaddafi without a clear authority to fill the power vacuum can see Libya rapidly hurtling down to a Somalia-like chaos and anarchy. A blue-print to pull Libya from the brink has all the ingredients of sustainable democratic reforms to replace over 40 years of authoritarianism in Libya with a people-centered democracy. The African Union's Libyan roadmap has flatly rejected the hard power options being pushed by the West such as military intervention or declaration of a no-fly zone over Libya. However, it has strong imprints of the "Right to Protect" principle as the framework of human rights and democratic transformation which signals the drift of Gaddafi's power into its twilight phase and the parallel dawn of democracy in Libya.

After a curiously long wait, the African Union has finally agreed on a blue-print to avert a Somalia-like anarchy in Libya where protesters-turn armed insurgents are fighting to end Col. Muammar Gaddafi's 42 year rule. The Libyan uprising, which began on 14 February 2011 as a series of revolts against the Gaddafi regime, appear to have stridently turned into a deadly civil war. Unlike Tunisia's Ben Ali or Egypt Hosni Mubarak who bowed to popular revolts, Gaddafi vowed to fight back in defense of his monopoly of power in Libya. "I will fight to death," he vowed as he responded to the protests in Tripoli, Benghazi and other cities with unprecedented show of force by the military, the police and claims of artillery and warplanes. At least 1,000 people have been killed in the ongoing conflict. Libya has come under international censure, condemnation, sanctions, investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and even threat of military intervention ala Iraq for excessive use of violence against civilian protesters. While public protests against the Gaddafi Government may have started over two years ago over the massacre of 1,200 prisoners in Tripoli, this is far and away the most determined and formidable challenge which has shaken the roots of Gaddafi's power.

Making Sense of the Libya Uprising

A consultative forum of representatives of African governments, civil society and intellectuals organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on 10 March 2011 provided a conceptual rendition of the Libyan uprising. Discussion traced the inspiration for the anti-Gaddafi rebellion to protests in Tunisia and Egypt, linking it to the broader uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. Libya's uprising is inextricably linked to the global movement for democratic governance everywhere challenging the ethos of elite-driven and top-down models that blend political repression and socio-economic marginalization.

The Libyan revolt shares the democratic deficit of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolts, argues Mohamed Salih, a Netherlands-based Sudanese expert. Failure to democratize political succession processes and set definite term



limits has led to the phenomenon of sit-tight regimes (Ben Ali, 23 years; Mubarak, 32 years; and Gaddafi, 42 years).

The popular global narrative is that the Libyan protests erupted in 2011. But accounts point out that open resistance to the repressive Gaddafi regime appeared in Libyan streets more than two years ago. The revolts were spearheaded by a small group of families that began holding weekly demonstrations in Benghazi, the city that has become the epicenter of recent anti-Gaddafi uprising, in an unprecedented campaign to seek the truth about a 1996 massacre of more than 1,200 prisoners at the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli following a prison riot over poor conditions. As such, Libya's uprising signify Africa's trapped democratic transitions, weak institutions, and stalled generational transfer of power by the old-guards to the youth stratum, which has used social media (blogs, face-book and twitter) to organize the opposition.

Libya's protests also connote the failure to link democracy and development. "This failure to link democracy and development explains the ferocity of the North African protests", argues the Nigerian academic, Adele Jinadu. The icon of the North African uprisings is Mohamed Bouazizi the vendor whose self-immolation on 17 December was eulogized as the ultimate protest against the indignity and repression in the low-end informal sector of Tunisian political economy.

Largely owned by foreign firms and clan/family-based networks, Libya's oil-driven 'enclave' economy has relied on expatriates and migrant labour from the rest of Africa, Asia and even Eastern Europe (Libya attracted 1-2 million workers from Sub-Saharan Africa and some 30,000 Chinese workers). The Gaddafi family is reputed to hold a massive wealth, including the \$70billion Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) controlled by Gaddafi's sons.

Libya's uprising is celebrated as part of "popular pro-democracy revolutions" sweeping North Africa. "The changes taking place in North Africa are not revolts," declared a Tunisian diplomat in the ECA forum. "They are people-based democratic revolutions which are not elite-led or linked to political parties," he adds. However, the tragic events in Libya are challenging this euphoric celebration of North Africa's "popular revolutions" and calling for a rethink of their context and implications for democracy.

AU Libyan Roadmap

On 11 March, the African Union's Peace and Security Council held a meeting at the level of the Heads of State and government, which provided the policy rendition of the Libyan ferment that has rapidly turned into a human tragedy. In early March, a military conflict pitting Gaddafi loyalists against heavily armed protesters-turn-rebels has precipitated a deadly humanitarian crisis prompting the AU to call on "Libyan authorities to act with utmost restraint, ensure the protection and the security of their citizens and that of foreign nationals living in Libya, and to facilitate the timely and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected populations."

In its Libyan blue-print, the AU has proposed an international action and a clear roadmap which rejects a military solution to the Libyan crisis, but endorsed the "legitimacy of the aspirations of the Libyan people for democracy" and espouses a democratic path which has sounded the death knell to Gaddafi in power.

The AU Libya roadmap has created an AU Observer Mission to Libya (OML) to monitor the situation in the country. It proposes a four-plank strategy:

- Immediate cessation of hostilities, including violence directed at civilian population;
- Release of prisoners and respect for basic freedoms as part of confidence-building measures;



- Establishment of an inclusive transition arrangement during the “transition period” to adopt a new democratic constitution and elected institutions based on good governance; and
- Address humanitarian issues, including the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance, protection of the rights and safety of all foreign nationals, in particular the African migrants living and working in Libya and the evacuation of those keen on leaving the country.

Once more, the AU is asserting its right to intervene in a member state to protect life and promote democratic peace, creating an ad-hoc High-Level Committee on Libya made up of African leaders, the Chairperson of the AU Commission and supported by a team of ministers holding the foreign affairs portfolios. The Committee is also tasked with the coordination action by AU’s partners, including the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the European Union and the United Nations.

The AU has steered clear of hard-power options in response to the Libyan crisis. It has flatly rejected military intervention proffered by some Western powers (Britain, America, Canada and Italy) and the idea of ‘No-fly Zone’ to ground Libya’s 18,000-strong air force (with its 13 bases and now supporting Libya’s 50,000-strong army) to ease his hold on power and strengthen the hand of anti- Gaddafi rebels.

The claim that the Gaddafi government is using mercenaries reportedly hired mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa (and the former Yugoslavia) has drawn attention to the African Union’s Convention on the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. Media reports have claimed that Gaddafi’s loyalists have recruited Ghanaian mercenaries, paying them a colossal 2,500 dollars per day. There are also claims that advertisements for mercenaries also appeared in the Nigerian Newspapers. Ukrainian and Serbian mercenaries have also been reported to be fighting alongside Gaddafi loyalists, a charge reinforced by the fact that Libya used Serbian fighters to put down a civilian uprising in the 1990s.

In its communiqué, the AU has given Libya a benefit of doubt. It has requested “the Commission to gather information on the reported presence of mercenaries in Libya and their actions, to enable it, should these reports be confirmed, to take the required measures in line with the convention.” The claims are stoking the embers of racism against black Africans, including 50% of Libyans who are black.

The Gaddafi government still enjoys the overwhelming backing of leaders in Africa. However, his regime has faced an unprecedented and its most formidable challenge, and his power has entered its twilight moment.

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