

The Libya Crisis: The Militarisation of the New Scramble and More

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Abstract

The conflict in Libya that invited involvement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the demonisation of Colonel Gaddafi as a ruthless tyrant clearly showed the desire of the West to militarise the New Scramble for African resources, a process which has become so pervasive in the current age. This paper argues that while the political misgivings of the Libyan regime under Gaddafi were clear for all to see, the problem did not need the intervention of NATO. The paper also advances the opinion that the Libya crisis will cause instability domestically and regionally. Finally the paper also holds that the Libya war is the same as the Iraqi and Afghan wars whose other objective is the creation of conflict in the hope of making huge profits in post-conflict reconstruction, a phenomenon called for profit war. The paper recommends that African leaders should not hold their people at ransom by monopolising political space as this creates room for the entrance of World powers who thrive on creating chaos in the hope of gaining scores in the New Scramble for African Resources.

Key words: Africa, Libya, Conflict, Resources, militarisation.

Introduction

The year 2011 dawned with revolutionary seeds in most of North Africa and some parts of the Middle East. Indeed, once sown in Tunisia and ripening in the deposition of Ben Ali, the seeds of this revolution were blown to Egypt accounting for Mubarak's seat. Morocco was also not spared as it witnessed sporadic mass protests. The revolutionary wind continues to blow in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. In all these revolutions, the basic objective has been to depose dictatorial regimes and replace them with those that are more open and responsive to basic demands for human rights and political space. Among all these countries, however, Libya was worst affected. Instead of the revolution swiftly sending Muammar Gaddafi packing, the incumbent put a fight of resistance, eventually turning the revolution into a full blown war between the government and the rebels (revolutionaries). What differentiates Libya and the other affected countries is that the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) overwhelmingly approved a resolution that eventually led to the imposition of a 'no-fly zone' over Libya, but giving NATO the responsibility to bomb strategic government military installations and arsenals.

By passing Resolution (1973), the UNSC gave NATO-deliberately or unwittingly- the right to aid rebels in their fight against Gaddafi under the Responsibility to protect (R2P) facade. However the real ambitions of NATO were not simply protecting civilians from the savage that Gaddafi was but to lay their hands on Libya's oil, which they have already done, and to get profitable reconstruction contracts. Implicit in all this supposed benevolence is disaster capitalism spreading its tentacles to Africa and a militarisation of the New Scramble for Africa's resources.

However, though Libya is an opportunity for those who made or are making profits from Iraq and Afghanistan to further line their pockets, there is a risk that the conflict in Libya might have opened a can of worms not only for the country but for the whole North African region. Islamic fundamentalists are likely to join hands with the deceased leader's followers together with sympathetic tribes. This will create chaos that might reach the levels of Afghanistan. Suicide bombs against Western elements and establishments will increase and general discord might be sown in society because of these elements. However NATO countries and other profit driven countries will maintain covert and overt presence in the country in order to gain access to Libyan oil and spill over benefits. China will also increase its influence to access the spoils; its delayed recognition of the TNC authority is a reflection of its refusal to play catch up to Europe and the United States of America (USA) in the scramble for African resources. Faced with these problems the African Union seems to be out of solutions to stop the new phenomenon of the New Scramble's militarisation.

Its hesitant recognition of the TNC reflects a desire to defend values of sovereignty while at the same time trying to come to terms with the debilitating process that has started in the continent. The position of the continental body is highly tenuous since talking too much against the West, from where donor funds come, is analogous to biting the proverbial hand that feeds it.

Ramifications of Resolution 1973

Resolution 1973 came after resolution 1970 proved ineffective in deterring Gaddafi from violently suppressing the mass protests against his grip on power. Resolution 1970, according to Shah (2011, April 5) was designed to call for restraint and to report any human rights abuses to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Resolution 1973 was passed by the UNSC in March 2011 to authorise a no-fly zone for the protection of civilians. In a clear addition to the growing controversies of the use of force, Shah added that resolution 1973 mandated NATO to use 'all necessary means to protect civilians'. This elasticity could have contributed to NATO's involvement as an offensive force on the side of the rebels and the eventual defeat of the Gaddafi forces and Gaddafi's eventual death. Questions beg answers as to the sincerity of NATO's intentions in the Libya campaign. For example, why would NATO members rush into a military campaign to remove Gaddafi from power and not do the same in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen where civilians continue to be killed by incumbent regimes? Was Gaddafi a worse dictator than Al Assad, Ali Abdullah Saleh or the Al Khalifa family? In the case of Bahrain, the USA is particularly seen to be playing double standards since Saudi Arabia, one of its closest allies in the Middle East, is backing the regime in Manama in its violent crackdown on protests. Ironically, Bahrain is home to a US navy base and is a closer ally of Saudi Arabia. In an incisive analysis, Escobar (2011, April 2 as cited in Shah, 2011, April 5), notes that, 'Saudi officials say they gave their backing to Western airstrikes on Libya in exchange for the United States muting its criticism of the authorities in Bahrain, a close ally of the desert kingdom'.

Basing on this observation, it more than boggles the mind why Western countries would want to liberate one country from the hands of a dictator while leaving other people suffering at the hands of similarly brutal regimes. It only signals a desire to militarise their search for African resources. The 'all means necessary' clause was immediately implemented in the form of a bombing operation code named Operation Odyssey Dawn. The operation was started by a campaign by French fighter jets. While the French air force was busy destroying Gaddafi's capacity to resist, Nicholas Sarkozy's government began a diplomatic offensive aimed at building a strong relationship with the leadership of the NTC. Through out the campaign France played a critical role that is certain to model future relations between the two parties. Resolution 1973 all but militarised the new scramble for African resources. It was an opportunity the active participants in the process had been waiting for and this is evidenced by the speed with which Resolution 1973 was implemented in Libya, of course with the backing of the rebel forces. It is prudent to point out that while it was noble to impose a no fly zone for the protection of civilians, it is the double standards of the involved governments that exposed their real ambitions in the country. If they were not so much interested in Libyan resources, why did they not split the operations so that they would also cover other affected countries since they have shown that they have the money for peace operations? This is where notions of the militarisation of the new scramble count strong.

For Profit war

Notwithstanding the need for political reform in a dictatorship as Libya under Gaddafi, the involvement of the Western backed NATO clearly displayed extra motives. In an age were the United States is acting like an international war monger on the loose, mainly with economic and security interests in mind, Libya has become another unfortunate example of a country destroyed for purposes of making profit out of the wreckage and debris of war. An earlier example is Iraq where various US corporations have snapped profitable oil and reconstruction contracts. As Klein (2007:313) succinctly put it,

Saddam's removal from power has opened vistas of opportunities for the oil giants, including Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, Shell and BP, all of whom had been laying the groundwork for new deals in Iraq, as well as for Halliburton, which with its move to Dubai, is perfectly positioned to sell its energy services to all these companies. Already the war itself has been the single most profitable event in Halliburton's history.

This extract clearly shows that profits drive the new generation of wars in which the USA and its European allies are involved. Indeed the Pentagon has also turned into a profit seeking organisation with high ranking officials like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld involved in most of the companies that profit from war. For example Klein (2007) posits that Dick Cheney is a major shareholder in Halliburton, which is a reputable US energy services contractor.

The Libya crisis was arguably initiated, covertly or otherwise, for profit making purposes. Being the country with the sixth largest oil reserves in the world (Smith, 2011), Libya became an automatic target for destabilisation, especially when there is so much competition for access to African resources between the US led western block and China on the other hand. Libya's historically checkered relationship with the west, worsened by involvement of the country's secret agents in the Lockerbie airplane bombing, Gaddafi's aborted nuclear weapons programme and his penchant for nationalisation, always pointed to a future of uncertainty, though relations had just begun to thaw somehow. It is no surprise hence that at the earliest opportunity, Gaddafi, undependable as he was, had to be taken out of the way.

In addition to the need for oil and related benefits, there is a great deal of reconstruction required in the immediate aftermath of the war. Certainly contractors from neighbouring countries will also benefit but it is mainly western and Chinese contractors who will get most of the tenders. Though the situation might be a bit different from Iraq where the USA was the 'governing authority', no significant difference will be seen since the NTC will always be indebted to those who supported them in the war. China, not so clean in its role in the new scramble, would seek to use its capability as a construction power house to get some impressive deals. However its hesitancy to recognise the NTC might leave it counting losses.

It is apparent, then, that the popular uprising against Gaddafi in February 2011 gave the west a perfect facade under which they could overthrow the Gaddafi regime and install a client regime that would serve their interests. As reported by Press TV on 14 June 2011, in Mid-May 2011, a few weeks after the NATO bombing campaign commenced, leaders of the NTC went to Washington for diplomatic talks. On June 8, 2011, the first shipment of Libyan oil arrived in the USA. This immediate establishment of oil relations between the two parties is aptly summarised in the following statement by a delegate at the 'Rebuilding Iraq 2' conference, 'The best time to invest is when there is still blood on the ground' (Klein, 2007: 326). Thus as the Libyan conflict raged on (assuming now that it is over with the death of Gaddafi), various secret deals were being made to ensure a profitable future for those helping in the removal of the dictator. The Libyan crisis thus had a dual character. It served as a reminder to African peoples that the new scramble is becoming militarised and that those able to make war and win have a profitable urge over their counterparts who spend much of their time defending values.

With the militarisation of the new scramble, the Africa Command (AFRICOM) will become very visible on the continent. Though its role has been touted as improving the defense capacity of various countries in the continent, the military command might be a pentagon instrument for the identification of countries to be targeted for destabilisation or outright invasion on the pretext of lack of democracy, crimes against humanity and related accusations. Sudan might actually be the next country in line for a Libya scenario since Al Bashir and Gaddafi were more or less alike. Gaddafi had a kind of love-hate relationship with the west, so does Al Bashir. Libya has vast oil resources, so does Sudan (though not so much now after the country's division into North and South). Gaddafi was accused of human rights abuses and possibly war crimes, so is Al Bashir. The list of similarities goes on and on. Despite oil concerns, there is always profit in reconstruction. So the militarisation of the new scramble and for profit war might seriously be upon Africa now.

Other concerns

Despite being the first example of the militarisation of the new scramble for African resources, the Libya crisis also has ingredients of instability both internally and in the North African belt. Certainly Libya under Gaddafi was somehow peaceful, with no major threats from Islamic fundamentalist elements in the region. Tuareg forces that operate in the Sahel region and that have traditionally threatened countries such as Mali, Niger, Mauritania and their neighbours will certainly now pose a threat to Libya as well. In fact, McTernan (2011: 45) notes that, 'As Gaddafi was a financier of past Tuareg rebellions, there is a risk that groups of the nomadic people of West Africa will continue to be a source of instability'. Gaddafi's death has an effect of introducing feelings of hostility into the Tuareg groups against the NTC and its western backers. According to McTernan (2011:44) the Tuareg fighters are also believed to have fought on the side of Gaddafi forces against the rebels and the concern is that they returned with weapons to their respective bases after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. This unfortunate scenario poses grave threats to the stability both West Africa and the North African belt. This is already occurring following sporadic skirmishes between the Malian military and the Tuareg forces. The other concern has to do with the threat of the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This group of Islamic fundamentalists has been a thorn in the flesh for Algeria and Western companies for a considerable time. The group thrives on hostage taking, especially of Westerners, demanding ransom payments for their release.

Various episodes of suicide bombing have been experienced in Algeria as a result of the activities of this group. McTernan also believes that as a result of the fall of Gaddafi, who himself supported Tuareg fighters, the relationship between the Tuareg and AQIM might be strengthened. There is also a possibility that Libya might turn into another Afghanistan or Iraq as a result of the sharp divisions that exist between a Western Civilisation which will be brought by droves of Westerners coming for various reasons in the 'liberated zone' and the conservative Islamic fundamentalist beliefs of Al Qaeda elements in Libya and in the region. This scenario is aptly forwarded by Huntington (1993) in his famous Clash of Civilisations thesis.

What makes AQIM's chances of establishing operations in the new Libya brighter is the fact that the NTC is suspected to have Al Qaeda elements in its ranks. As McTernan (2011:44) notes, 'One of the NTC's new military leaders Abdel Hakim Belhadj is said to have had affiliations with Al Qaeda, a relationship that NTC spokesman Al-Amin Belhadj denies'. However, the fact that Hakim Belhadj is an experienced jihadist is beyond question. For instance, the Africa Report (2011, October, page 18) in an article entitled 'Abdel Hakim Belhadj' mentions that he fought with other Libyan jihadists in Afghanistan against the Soviets and formed a group called the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) to oust Gaddafi. However his various attempts to organise opposition against Gaddafi led to his arrest. He was also quoted threatening to sue British and USA secret services for unlawful arrest in Malaysia in 2004. If Al Qaeda elements are indeed among the high ranking officers in the NTC, an unusual and paradoxical situation is created since the West is heavily set against the group. Witch hunting activities will most likely take place, forcing those wanted to go underground, and this will create greater security problems for both the country and the region.

Another concern is that after all the basic interests of for profit war have been achieved, Libya will be used as a springboard for the fight against terrorism. The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has already been taken to countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan and nothing will stop it from going to Libya as well. With the threat of AQIM growing, and with increasing viciousness with which Boko Haram is carrying out mass murder in Nigeria, Libya might just be the perfect base from which to destroy these organisations. It is also possible that the idea of a permanent military brigade stationed in Libya might be in the minds of the Pentagon strategists. Alternatively it might be used to host AFRICOM operatives overseeing security developments in North Africa. However, all these are just possibilities. Libyans should hence be aware of these threats to the new path that they have decided to take. There is need for a political arrangement that satisfies the interests of the diverse groups involved in the ouster of Gaddafi. There is also need for the implementation of economic and social policies that do not drive the youths into Islamic fundamentalism. Economic benefits should also be equitably shared.

The African Union - New Libya relations: Prospects.

The Libya crisis has left so many questions on the ability of the African Union (AU) to resolve conflicts on the continent without outside help. The fact that the three AU members in the UNSC voted for Resolution 1973 for the establishment of a no-fly zone and the consequent bombardment of Libya by NATO implies that the AU does not trust its own capacity to deal with conflicts of the magnitude in Libya. According to Dr.Akonor (2011), China noted that it had not exercised its veto out of its respect for the AU and the Arab League. By voting for Resolution 1973, the AU had shown its capitulation to Western pressure and in doing that it was unwittingly giving NATO the responsibility to deal with an African conflict. The effectiveness of African solutions for African problems can certainly be questioned in the case of Libya. However, while the Libyan problem had grown to proportions where civilians were no longer safe, it was not NATO that was supposed to intervene in Libya, rather, it was the African Union. As Dr.Akonor (2011, para. 13) correctly pointed out, 'Article 4 (h) of the AU act gives the AU the right to intervene forcibly in one of its member states with regards to war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity'. Why would the AU go through the longer path via the UN when they could intervene directly in Libya?

The major problem with the continental body is its members' insistence on the respect of the territorial sovereignty of constituent countries. Instead of rushing to help the people of Libya under R2P and Article 4 (h), the AU was busy defending values of sovereignty, independence and brotherhood. This weakens the organisation and creates room for the more decisive groups like NATO to assume responsibility. In fact the AU could have lost the respect of the NTC as a result of its indecisiveness in taking action against Gaddafi. The AU had always wanted a kind of political compromise in Libya. That arrangement would have included members of both the Gaddafi regime and those of the NTC rebels. According to Mkwate, M and Ogbuna, O (2011), this position was made clear by Zimbabwe's Foreign Affairs minister, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi, after attending AU closed door meetings during the General Assembly meeting in September 2011 when he said,

'The position is that the NTC is required to set up an inclusive government before they can occupy an AU seat'. This position did not materialise because the NTC aimed at totally defeating Gaddafi and establishing a new government, setting the path to democracy. The AU's insistence on inclusive governments as a conflict management or resolution strategy has outlived its usefulness. It indicates a poverty of alternatives to solve the ever increasing conflicts in Africa. The eventual ouster of Gbagbo in Ivory Coast by Quattara's military forces repudiates the effectiveness of governments of national unity as transition mechanisms. The continual feuding between parties in Zimbabwe's inclusive government and the animosity in the Kenyan government of national unity point to a bleak future in terms of power transition. Violence may break out again. The AU's position on the crisis in Libya was also made weak by the fact that the General Assembly had already voted to give the NTC a seat hence though some AU members wanted the establishment of a Zimbabwe or Kenya style inclusive government, they would eventually get into line with what the UN wanted in Libya. However implicit in the AU's call for an inclusive government in Libya is the idea that Gaddafi had to be included in any political arrangement set up to bring peace in the country. Obviously this is a position that was certainly not welcome to the NTC and could have adverse repercussions for relations between the new leadership in Libya and the African Union.

However, since a considerable number of AU members have recognised the NTC, relations between these members, and hypothetically, with the AU are set to improve. What is not certain is whether the NTC will seek to align more with AU or the Arab League. However, prospects for relations with both sides are balanced since both sides committed the same crime; giving too much undeserved respect to Gaddafi. However, the NTC may become more aligned to the Arab League as a result of the Islamic factor. That notwithstanding, the AU needs the membership of the NTC as well. Libya's oil money under the NTC is still valuable to AU as much as it was important during the Gaddafi era. Various benefits can also accrue to AU members as a result of trade and investment. Libya also plays a significant role in intra-COMESA trade. There is therefore need for constructive engagement between the AU and the Libyan government for the benefit of both parties. The AU can also try to apply itself more in the political development of the new Libya. Indeed technical experts in the field of governance need not come from the USA or Europe alone, the AU can also send its experts to Libya to help in the establishment of effective government institutions. Experts can also be send for purposes of peace building, conflict transformation and post conflict reconstruction. This will make the NTC feel more acceptable to the continental body and further relations can be built on that foundation. It is better to do a little something than not to do anything at all.

Conclusions

The Libyan conflict has left an indelible imprint on the African continent. While the greater number of Libyans celebrated the downfall of Gaddafi, it is the West who seem to be celebrating more. The military help given by NATO in the NTC's ouster of Gaddafi gave the Westerners especially France, the United Kingdom and the United States the room to both invest in Libya's oil industry and to beef up their oil stockpiles in view of an uncertain energy future. It is the submission of this paper that NATO's involvement in Libya marked the first attempt by the West to militarise the new scramble for African resources in the present age. It is also the submission of this paper that if African leaders continue with their mostly dictatorial tendencies, resource hungry western countries will use the grievances brewed by such a style of rule as a ruse to intervene militarily to uphold and protect human rights and liberties. The moment people rise against their government, out of their own will or because of external machinations, there is likelihood that Governments will use force to quell the protests as is rampant in the continent. This is the process that can attract the intervention of the West as happened in Libya. African governments should therefore be democratic, transparent and should respect the people's will. The nexus between economic and political freedom is very strong, hence the need to avail both economic and political opportunities. Gaddafi's mistake is that he concentrated much on the economic and social aspects and left out the political in an attempt to create a socialist utopia.

It should also be born in mind that the search for markets, investment opportunities and most importantly profit continues to push especially corporates into new areas. With the debilitating phenomenon of for profit war taking the Middle East by storm, in the not so distant future Sub Saharan Africa will also be a victim. There is money to be made in the reconstruction of the ruins of war hence the belief by some authorities that war has actually become a nakedly profit seeking venture. So in Libya, besides gaining access to crude oil and other spin offs, the Western corporates will be making profits through reconstruction tenders. However this does not imply that able African corporates will not benefit. Further, this paper has also submitted that the Libyan conflict might brew insecurity and more conflict in the Maghreb.

Some weapons are believed to have made their way out of Libya, possibly to Tuareg forces and the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. All these groups have always been a threat to peace and security in North and West Africa. In addition to the threat posed by these groups, the presence of various western nationalities might lead to an escalation of terrorist attacks by groups set against them. Abduction of westerners that have been carried out by AQIM in the region will likely increase and this will go a long way in financing the operations of such groups when ransom is paid. However things may turn bloodier like in Iraq after the invasion of the country by USA-led forces. The African Union made the blunder of allowing NATO's involvement in Libya as a result of their indecisiveness. This also probably shows that the AU possesses neither the capacity nor the ability to tackle high intensity conflicts in the continent. This can also be seen in the Ivory Coast case where the continental body tried to accommodate, Laurent Gbagbo when it was clear that he had lost the elections. The resort to force of arms by the Quattara camp is an indication that the AU had once again failed in its diplomatic mandate. The support given to the UN Resolution 1970 and most importantly 1973 by African countries was an admission on their part that the AU had failed to resolve yet another conflict in 2011. The AU should become more proactive in the resolution of conflicts in the continent, late or indecisive reactions create room for outsiders to take responsibility for the protection of African citizens and in the process, those foreign countries can create conditions for resource exploitation and the creation of client states. The African Union is hence equally responsible, through its indecisiveness, in the breeding and perpetuation of neo-colonialism in the continent.

Recommendations

The Libyan crisis, as has already been alluded to, exposed the inability of the AU to effectively deal with conflict. The African Union should boost its conflict prevention, resolution and mediation capacities through training of professionals in such fields. Reliance on heads of state has proved a futile exercise, especially in 2011 where Zuma's diplomatic performance in both Libya and Cote D'Voire was unsatisfactory. The African Union should hence keep a clique of well trained non state negotiators and these can play a critical role in the peaceful resolution of conflicts before they become full blown. The African Union should also pursue the concept of having regional military brigades. The AU has put a plan to have a permanent military brigade, but has not yet operationalised the plan. Military brigades can go a long way in conflict prevention in the various regions in which they will be stationed.

African leaders should respect the political rights of citizens. Stifling people's political rights under any circumstances is not acceptable. African people can not brook being politically colonised by one of their own when colonialism is presumed to have ended way back. To prevent conflict, the will of the people should be respected. The new scramble for African resources is a pervasive process that is taking root in Africa. The USA, Europe and China are the most active participants in this process, yet Africa seems not to be noticing. Terribly however, the NATO intervention in Libya, though couched in humanitarian goals, has demonstrated the desire by participants in the new scramble to militarise the process, creating profit making opportunities in the process. AFRICOM has also come to represent a possible militarisation of the new scramble in the future as part of US foreign policy in Africa. African countries should hence seek partners not exploiters. These partners should be willing to value-add various minerals in the country of extraction to ensure that meaningful benefits accrue to African countries.

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