

THE RISE OF LIBYA AS A REGIONAL PLAYER

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Since relations with the Arab League soured in the late 1990s, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi has turned his attention toward building strategic alliances in Africa. As a pariah state under United Nations' sanctions, Libya sought recognition and respectability in the arena of intergovernmental meetings of African leaders.

Five years later, the extent of Libyan influence within the African Union, NEPAD and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) may be gauged against a history of less salutary military interventions and 'petro-dollar diplomacy' throughout the continent. To understand the role and impact of Gaddafi's Africa policy, it is first necessary to consider the internal dynamics of the country that has been ruled by decree for over three decades.

Libya's history of isolation

Libya is a one-party state with no formal constitution or independent judiciary. Political trials are held in secret, with no due process considerations. The arbitrary arrest and torture of hundreds of political prisoners has been documented by Amnesty International. The abduction and assassination of political dissidents in exile has also been reported. The state owns and controls all media and censors foreign programmes. Independent political parties and civic associations are illegal. Independent trade unions and professional

associations do not exist, workers' strikes are illegal and women's rights are limited (for example, they require permission to travel abroad).¹

The Libyan armed forces are estimated to be 90,000 strong, with 25,000 national service conscripts and a large number of militia belonging to the Revolutionary Guards Corps, the People's Cavalry Force and the People's Militia.² Libya has a large inventory of military equipment, however, its operational capabilities declined after the collapse of its primary arms supplier (the Soviet Union) and the imposition of UN arms embargoes. The CIA claimed to have proof in January 1992 that Libya had stockpiled over 100 tonnes of chemical weapons.³

Libya has allegedly been selling off some of its old stock of light weaponry supplied by the Soviets to rebel movements in Africa, fuelling conflicts in exchange for access to natural resources. For example, 'diamonds for guns' deals have allegedly been negotiated in the DRC⁴. Global Watch reports that the Liberian government is exchanging timber for illegal arms from Eastern Europe, via Libya, amongst others.⁵ This illicit trade contributes to the destabilization, by rebels backed by Liberian leader Charles Taylor, of Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone.

During Gaddafi's leadership, Libya has been in conflict with almost all of Libya's neighbours over the years. The list includes a

four-day war with Egypt in 1977, territorial disputes with Algeria, Niger and Tunisia, the failed invasions of Chad in the 1980s and the withdrawal from the Aozou Strip by order of the International Court of Justice in 1994. Military backing has been offered or given to various incumbent and rebel leaders, such as the late Zairean dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko, in 1996 and more recently, MLC leader Jean-Pierre Bemba in the DRC and elected President Angé Felix Patassé of the Central African Republic. Cash-strapped governments, such as Zimbabwe and Malawi, have also been recipients of Gaddafi's largesse during his motorcade tours of Southern Africa between 2000 and 2002.

The Libyan leader's generosity to Sub-Saharan Africa has not been well received at home. Race riots in October 2000, in which an estimated 150 black migrants were killed and thousands expelled from the country, showed a rejection of Gaddafi's opening borders to African workers when an estimated one-third of Libya's youth are unemployed.⁶ At the same time, the suspension of UN sanctions against Libya in 1999 raised economic expectations, spurring Gaddafi to seek full acceptance, if not internationally or among Arab nations, then within Africa.

A United States of Africa

In February 1997 some 40 OAU foreign ministers gathered for a Council of Ministers Meeting that was the first major conference in Tripoli since UN sanctions were imposed. From then on, resolutions calling for UN sanctions against Libya to be lifted and/or flouted by African countries were recorded at every Heads of State and Government Summit. At the launch of the African Union in Durban in July 2002, delegates took note of the settlement of the Lockerbie case and "urgently request[ed] the Security Council to immediately and definitively lift these sanctions and embargo imposed on Libya which no longer have legal or moral justification."⁷

Gaddafi proposed to the OAU's Algiers Summit of July 1999, that an extraordinary session be convened "to discuss ways and means of making the OAU effective."⁸

Thereafter, he presented the African Heads of State gathered in Sirte on 9 September 1999 with his grand vision for a 'United States of Africa', with a single army, currency and powerful leadership. The process by which the African Union was then realized and launched in July 2002 is well known, and is described elsewhere in this journal in the essay by Baimu and Sturman.⁹

CEN-SAD

The extent to which Libya bought into African regional politics after 1997 is evident from the establishment of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) in Tripoli on 4 February 1998. The new organization was originally called COMESSA, until objections that the acronym was too similar to the existing Community of East African States (COMESA). According to the official website (currently under construction):

"CEN-SAD is a framework for Integration and Complementarity. It intends to work, together with the other regional economic communities and the Organization of African Unity, to strengthen peace, security and stability and achieve global economic and social development."¹⁰

In other words, CEN-SAD positions itself as an REC, like the other regional organizations recognized as the building blocks of African integration by the OAU Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community, 1991 (Abuja Treaty). The Abuja Treaty was intended to work through RECs from the five regions designated by the OAU¹¹. Those designated by the OAU in the early 1990s were the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); COMESA and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). However, due to political tensions, including between Morocco and its North African neighbours and the OAU over recognition of Western Sahara, the AMU was paralysed by the mid-1990s and never signed the OAU Protocol on Relations between the AEC and RECs. The AMU Secretariat was based outside OAU territory in Rabat, while mutual suspicion and dis-

trust divided the five members, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia.

Gaddafi took this gap to initiate his own REC in Tripoli, where a Treaty on the Establishment of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States was signed by the Heads of State of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan and the 'Leader of the Great El-Fateh Revolution'.¹² Notably none of these countries other than Libya were members of the OAU's Northern region or the AMU. The Secretariat of CEN-SAD is located in Libya under Secretary-General Dr Mohamed Al-Madani Al-Azhari.

At the first Conference of Leaders and Heads of State, also hosted by Libya in Sirte, April 1999, Central African Republic and Eritrea joined from the Central and East African regions respectively. In February 2000 Senegal, Gambia and Djibouti followed suit at the Conference held in N'djamena, Chad. Three North African states finally joined CEN-SAD in 2001/02 (Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco) and were joined by more from East and West—Nigeria, Benin, Togo and Somalia.

That three of the five founders of the NEPAD initiative, Presidents Obasanjo, Wade and Mubarak gave credence to the Libyan-driven organization during the same years that they were developing NEPAD should not go unnoticed. Significantly, however, these three African powers did not attend the 5th CEN-SAD Conference held in Niamey, Niger on 16 March 2003. Eritrea, Djibouti, Burkina Faso and Gambia were also absent.¹³

At first glance, CEN-SAD has all the formal trappings of the other RECs. However, it has a number of peculiarities. While overlapping membership is a vexing feature of all of the RECs, CEN-SAD cannot claim to have a North African core membership. Of its 18 members, eight belong to ECOWAS, two to ECCAS, and five to COMESA. The only real common ground that many of these member states appear to share is the patronage of Libya.

For example, a week before the Conference took place in Niamey, Libya pledged to invest US\$100 million in "micro-development projects" in Niger.¹⁴ In August 2002, Sudan was granted a US\$25 million loan from the African Bank for Development and Commerce for

CEN-SAD, based in Tripoli.¹⁵ Libyan links with ousted President Patassé of CAR have also been mentioned. Incidentally, President Patassé was removed from power during his attendance of the CEN-SAD Conference and less than three months after the withdrawal of 'CEN-SAD' troops from Bangui.

Apart from the political and administrative structures, the African Bank is so far the only CEN-SAD institution. However, signing of a Protocol establishing a Mechanism for Preventing, Managing and Settling Conflicts in Niamey in March 2003 will likely serve as a mandate for the other side of Libya's engagements in Africa, namely military intervention. Unlike the other RECs and the AU, CEN-SAD makes no claim to uphold human rights, democracy or good governance in its objectives. Instead, it broadcasts support for the leaders who are widely considered to be most in breach of these principles.

For example, the 4th Conference held in Sirte in March 2002 spoke out against, "the blatant interference of foreign powers in Zimbabwe's internal affairs under the guise of election monitoring" and hailed "the bold position of African delegations in favour of Zimbabwe at the last Commonwealth summit". When the Scottish Court in the Netherlands upheld its verdict on Lockerbie suspect Abdel Basset al-Megrahi, CEN-SAD issued a statement "rejecting the unfair hearing" and calling for the "release of the political hostage".

Conclusion

Officials of the African Union and NEPAD have taken CEN-SAD at face value, recognizing it as one of the five regional pillars of African integration and an implementing agency of NEPAD. According to the communiqué of the 5th CEN-SAD Conference in Niamey, AU chairperson, Amara Essy, made a speech in which he "asserted that the CEN-SAD gathering, which was established by the Leader Muammar al-Qathafi, is the basic foundation for building the great African Union." Addressing the UN Economic Commission for Africa in March 2002, former OAU secretary-general, Dr Salim Ahmed

Salim, described regional security architecture as including:

The ECOWAS' protocol on the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security signed on 10. December 1999; IGAD's Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) signed on 9th January 2002; the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security for Southern Africa; ECCAS' Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) and the mechanism which is being developed for CEN-SAD.

The Communiqué of the NEPAD Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee Meeting in Abuja, November 2002 noted that

The RECs, namely CEN-SAD, COMESA, ECCAS, ECOWAS and SADC participated and presented papers on their roles in the implementation of NEPAD... in light of their status as building blocs in the integration of the continent.”

If the original goals of NEPAD are to be realized—to enhance the development of Africa through improvements in political, economic and corporate governance, in partnership with the developed world—then CEN-SAD's capacity and political will to implement these

objectives requires closer scrutiny and debate. A leadership role in the RECs, the NEPAD Heads of State Implementation Committee and the African Union itself is surely a position to be earned (rather than assumed) through demonstrable commitment to the founding principles of these African initiatives.

Notes

1. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2002*.
2. *Jane's Sentinel—North Africa*, August 2000–January 2001, p. 341.
3. Ibid.
4. *Africa Confidential*, 40(23).
5. Global Watch, *The Usual Suspects: Liberia's Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone*, March 2003.
6. *The Economist*, 12/10/2000.
7. AHG/Dec.174(XXXVIII).
8. AHG/Dec.140(XXXV).
9. E Baimu & K Sturman, *Amendment to the African Union's right to intervene: A shift from human security to regime security?* in *African Security Review*, 12(2).
10. www.cen-sad.org
11. OAU Resolution CM/Res.464QCXVI (1976) on the Division of Africa into Five Regions: namely Northern, Western, Central, Southern and Eastern Africa.
12. <www.cen-sad.org>
13. *Communiqué of the 5th CEN-SAD Conference of Leaders and Heads of State*, Niamey 16/3/2003.
14. Panapress 5/3/2003.
15. Panapress 29/8/2002.