

Libya could break up like Somalia

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Libya is neither Tunisia nor Egypt. The ruling group (Gaddafi) and the forces fighting it are in no way analogous to their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts. Gaddafi has never been anything but a buffoon, whose emptiness of thought was reflected in his notorious 'Green Book'. Operating in a still-archaic society Gaddafi could indulge in successive 'nationalist' and 'socialist' speeches with little bearing on reality, and the next day proclaim himself a 'liberal'.

He did so to 'please the West', as though the choice for liberalism would have no social effects. But it had and, as is commonplace, it worsened living conditions for the majority of Libyans. The oil rent which was widely redistributed became the target of small groups of the privileged, including the family of the leader. Those conditions then gave rise to the well-known explosion, which the country's regionalists and political Islamists immediately took advantage of.

For Libya has never truly existed as a nation. It is a geographical region separating the Arab West from the Arab East (the Maghreb from the Mashreq). The boundary between the two goes right through the middle of Libya. Cyrenaica was historically Greek and Hellenistic before it became Mashreqian. Tripolitania, for its part, was Roman and became Maghrebian. Because of this, regionalism has always been strong in the country.

Nobody knows who the members of the National Transition Council in Benghazi really are. There may be democrats among them, but there are certainly Islamists, some among the worst of the breed, as well as regionalists. The president of the council is Mustafa Muhammad Abdeljelil, the judge who condemned the Bulgarian nurses to death and was rewarded by Gaddafi, who named him minister of justice from 2007 to February 2011. For that reason the prime minister of Bulgaria, Boikov, refused to recognise the council, but his argument was not given any follow up by the US and Europe.

From the outset 'the movement' in Libya took the form of an armed revolt fighting the army, rather than a wave of civilian demonstrations. And right away that armed revolt called NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) to its aid. Thus a chance for military intervention was offered to the imperialist powers.

Their aim is surely neither 'protecting civilians' nor 'democracy' but control over oilfields, underground water resources and acquisition of a major military base in the country. Of course, ever since Gaddafi embraced liberalism Western oil companies have had control over Libyan oil. But with Gaddafi nobody could be sure of anything. Suppose he were to switch sides tomorrow and start to play ball with the Indians and the Chinese? More important are the enormous underground water resources which could have been used to benefit the African Sahelian countries. Well-known French companies are interested in those resources (this is the reason for the early French involvement). They will use them in a more 'profitable' way to produce agro-fuels.

In 1969 Gaddafi demanded that the British and Americans leave the bases they had kept in the country since the Second World War. Currently the United States needs to find a place in Africa for its AFRICOM (the US military command for Africa, an important part of its alignment for military control over the world but which still has to be based in Stuttgart!). The African Union having

rejected it, until now no African country has dared to do so. A lackey installed in Tripoli would surely comply with all the demands of Washington and its NATO lieutenants. That would be a direct menace to Egypt and Algeria.

Having said that, it remains difficult to imagine how the 'new regime' will behave. The possibility of a disintegration in the Somali pattern should not be excluded.

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P.S.

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