

## Libya:

# Opting for Europe and Africa, Not Ties with Washington

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### Brief Analysis

While Philippine soldiers may not have succeeded in freeing Western hostages--including American Jeffrey Schilling--the ongoing standoff in the faraway Pacific has provided one more opportunity for Libyan leader Mu'ammarr Qaddafi to rehabilitate his tarnished international image. Qaddafi's latest humanitarian effort--ransoming hostages--reflects Libya's "new" diplomacy of offering to mediate regional conflicts and providing developmental aid to poverty-stricken countries. Libya's approach is helping rebuild its economic ties with Europe and its political ties with Africa, thereby reducing its incentive to improve relations with the United States.

U.S. Policy. To some extent, the Clinton Administration's policy toward states formerly known as rogue could be called "incremental normalization," that is, lifting restrictions gradually. In this context, for example, the United States in April 1999 lifted the ban on exports of foods and medicines to Libya, Iran, and Sudan. But there are important differences in how Washington treats each of these states. With Iran, the United States has engaged in many high-level gestures underscoring its desire for direct dialogue and has set forth the issues it would want to raise in such a dialogue, while with Iraq, U.S. policy is to isolate Saddam's regime, if not seek its replacement.

By contrast, U.S. policy towards Libya has been a study in ambiguity. In his April 2000 Senate testimony, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs Ronald Neumann stated that Washington "has no broad policy of rapprochement." At the same time, he said, "Libya is not Iraq. We do not seek to maintain sanctions until there is a change of regime in Tripoli." Indeed, Neumann stipulated in 1999, "change can now be imagined" in U.S.-Libyan relations. It would seem that Washington is seeking some means to provide Libya with incentives. A senior State Department official was recently quoted arguing, "If you only want to punish him [Qaddafi], he has no incentive to go out of the terrorism business."

The only set of indicators that has been laid out by a U.S. official regarding Libya was Neumann's November 1999 speech to the Middle East Institute, in which he said, "We would welcome Libya that complies with all aspects of UN Security Council conditions, that refrained from use of terror or support for terrorist groups to pursue its agenda; abjured WMD [weapons of mass destruction], and that helped to bring about peaceful resolution to regional conflicts." These provided a useful set of indicators by which to judge Libyan actions.

So far Libya's actions on these issues does not suggest that Qaddafi attaches any urgency to restoring ties with the United States.

- UN Resolutions. Tripoli's cooperation in the Lockerbie trial will almost surely be limited to the handover of the two primary suspects, as Libya has no intention of providing further evidence or additional witnesses. Qaddafi himself said that "the responsibility as far as this matter is concerned is an individual one. The court is sitting to judge them, not whether they are Libyan agents. If you go beyond that than it becomes an endless chain."

- Terror. In his November 1999 speech, Neumann observed, "We have seen definite changes in Libya's behavior, specifically declining support for terrorism." However, the evidence supporting this assertion is limited to Libya's 1998 expulsion from its territory of the Abu Nidal Organization, which had been dormant for the past decade. Far from renouncing terrorism, Libya denies ever engaging in such conduct. As Deputy Foreign Minister Hassouna Chaouch emphasized, "We never supported terrorism. All we did was to help freedom fighters in African and the Middle East." Or as Qaddafi said in August 1999, "Libya houses camps. We will never deny this fact. We acknowledge it with pride because these people are freedom fighters." Qaddafi has a long history of suspending relations with problematic insurgency and terrorist organizations when embroiled in a particularly acute international dispute, only to resume his support when the controversy passes.

- Weapons of Mass Destruction. Libyan policy reflects more continuity than change. Qaddafi has long seen merit in acquiring an unconventional military capability. As he mused in 1990, "If they know that you have a deterrent force capable of hitting the United States, they would not be able to hit you. Consequently we should build this force so that they and others will no longer think about an attack." Signaling that this is not mere bombast, the Central Intelligence Agency reported in August 2000, "Tripoli has not given up its goal of establishing its own offensive chemical weapons capability and continues to develop its nascent and still rudimentary nuclear research and development program." Libya's stockpile is even more ominous given its attempts to acquire missile technology from China and North Korea. In April 2000, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen noted that Libya "want[s] long-range missiles to coerce and threaten us--North American and European parts of NATO." Moreover, in the past month, it has been reported that U.S. intelligence sources have concluded that Libya is assisting Iraq in defying UN resolutions by transferring some of the latter's Scud missile plants and experts to Tripoli.

- Regional Conflicts. Qaddafi's conduct does not suggest that Libya has given up its revolutionary, anti-Western orientation. In the last few years, Libya devoted considerable funds to training and arming a new generation of African insurgents. Acting through his protégés in Liberia and Burkina Faso, Qaddafi is dispatching arms to rebels in Sierra Leone and Guinea while Libyan diplomats in West Africa are busy financing radical newspapers and radio stations. In the meantime, Qaddafi has emerged as an important source of funding for Eritrea in its war against Ethiopia and the anti-American forces in Congo.

Libya's Apparent Strategy. Libyan policy statements and actions suggest Tripoli aims to undermine its international isolation by forging links with the less demanding European and non-aligned countries. Lockerbie was the biggest hurdle, which was eventually overcome when Tripoli agreed to hand over the two suspects following assurances that the proceedings "would not be used to undermine the Libyan regime." The deal opened the way for a resumption of diplomatic relations with European states and the flow of much-needed foreign investments. As an unnamed Libyan official was quoted saying, "The countries of EU realize that they will lose out if they turn their backs on Libyan efforts to strengthen relations." Indeed, Libya has become a favorite European partner for new energy exploration, production, and development ventures. The European oil giants--Italy's ENI, France's Totalfina-Elf, Austria's OMV, Spain's Respol-YPF and Britain's Lasmocare--are in the process of investing a total of nearly \$10 billion in Libya's oil and gas industries. The international investments have helped revive the Libyan economy whose GDP is projected by Economic Intelligence Unit to grow by 6.2% in 2000 and 5.5% in 2001, after shrinking 0.6% in 1998.

Tripoli's political resurrection is even more impressive, as the once-isolated Qaddafi is now an important player on the African roundtable. The Colonel's mediation of crises in Central Africa and the Horn has gained him the vital

diplomatic support of the Organization of African Unity.

As a result of Libya's enhanced international status and reclaimed trade partnerships, Tripoli today has limited incentive to seek ties with the United States. As Qaddafi recently said in April 1999, "I do not want a pardon from America, because I don't need American respect. It is an honor for me to stay on the U.S. blacklist forever."

Moreover, Chaouch said in March 2000, "It is America who severed ties with Libya. If ties are to be resumed then Washington must stop interfering in internal Libyan affairs." Meanwhile, in its broadcast JANA [Libya's official news agency] has identified a culprit for the lack of progress in U.S.-Libya relations: "Jews who do not care at all about the interests of the American people. It is they [the Jews] who are working against any rapprochement between the peoples."

Conclusion. Qaddafi may be an ideologue, but he is also capable of shrewd geopolitical calculations. Libya has demonstrated that a small country can escape isolation and revive its economy without America's approbation or its active cooperation. He has employed the lure of Libya's market to cement relations with European and non-aligned states. As a result, Libya does not need ties with the United States to achieve any particular policy goals. U.S. policymakers should, therefore, have low expectations about constructive Libyan movement on issues of continuing concern to U.S. policy.

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