

Qadhafi's Calculated Diplomacy: Circumventing Lockerbie

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Brief Analysis

Since the handover of the suspects in the 1988 bombing of PanAm flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, Col. Mu'ammar Qadhafi has embarked on a series of diplomatic initiatives suggesting a fundamental reorientation of Libya's foreign policy. The once-uncompromising ideologue has embraced the mantle of a statesman who appears to adhere to the prevailing international order. The issue that seems to be driving Qadhafi's "new diplomacy" is still the Lockerbie imbroglio. By forging economic and political links to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, Qadhafi hopes to undermine the international community's cohesion on the sanctions issue, irrespective of the outcome of the Lockerbie trial.

Qadhafi's Ideological Continuity: To understand Qadhafi's recent diplomacy, one must have an appreciation of his traditional pattern of behavior. During the past three decades, when Qadhafi's policies have led to Libya's political and diplomatic isolation, his radicalism has often lapsed into phases of pragmatism. In the late 1980s, when Libya's armed intervention in Chad fostered its ostracism from Africa, Qadhafi readjusted his priorities and militarily disengaged from Chad. Similarly, in the Arab world, Qadhafi has often oscillated between revolutionary movements and established regimes, depending on which best served his immediate objectives. Such alteration of tactics, however dramatic, cannot be interpreted as Qadhafi's abandonment of his long-held political philosophy. Libya's foreign policy rests on certain ideological constants, namely Qadhafi's long-held belief that the interests of the nonaligned bloc can be advanced only by the elimination of America's political and economic dominance. Only then will an emancipated Third World reassert its role as one of the crucial pillars in a multipolar international community.

Lockerbie-Centered Diplomacy: On the surface, Qadhafi displays ample indifference to the Lockerbie proceedings, even dismissing the continuation of the sanctions as "an issue of imperialism." Yet, despite Qadhafi's posture, it is important to stress that the Lockerbie case is far from over and that the UN-imposed sanctions have only been suspended, not permanently lifted. As the trial proceeds, evidence may emerge implicating the regime's senior officials, which could lead the UN to reimpose the suspended sanctions. Through a rapid reengagement with the nonaligned bloc and the European Union (EU), Libya can provide incentives for the continuation of the status quo. Moreover, having abandoned his economic liberalization program, Qadhafi hopes that foreign investments and renewed access to Western technology will reinvigorate Libya's stagnant economy. A combination of diplomatic necessity and economic expediency seems to be driving Qadhafi's concerted diplomacy.

Europe: Libya has long had an economic relationship with Europe, as its location and natural resources make it an attractive market for the European states. Since the suspension of the sanctions, Libya has buttressed its already cordial relations with the EU through lucrative new contracts. The recent signing of the \$5.5 billion agreement with the Italian oil company ENI solidifies Libya's position as Italy's largest source of energy. In addition, Tripoli is in the process of concluding contracts with various German, French, British, Swiss, and Spanish firms to develop Libya's oil industry, transportation network, and banking system. One major project is the Great Man-Made River, costing more than \$20 billion. This attempt to transport water from underground Saharan basins to Libya's coastal cities promises to be one of the world's largest capital projects.

In the meantime, Libya has removed two important obstacles to Europe's financial markets by successfully settling outstanding disputes with France and Britain. In accordance with French demands, Libya has paid \$40 million in compensation to the families of the 170 people killed in the 1989 bombing of UTA flight 179 over Africa. France seems prepared to close the case, as the French Foreign Ministry expressed "satisfaction with Libya's payment of this indemnity." Libya has similarly concluded an agreement with Britain by accepting "general responsibility" for the 1984 shooting of British policewoman Yvonne Fletcher. Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, in resuming diplomatic relations with Libya last month, acknowledged that the conclusion of the Fletcher case is "helpful in making Libya a member of the international community, a country which can take part in its norms and therefore makes that community perhaps a bit less dangerous." By resolving these emotional issues and developing a web of financial interests, Libya has successfully eroded leading European states' motivation for revisiting the sanctions issue.

The Middle East: Since the suspension of the sanctions, Qadhafi has not exempted the Middle East from his diplomatic offensives, and a procession of Arab leaders have visited the colonel and pledged their solidarity with his struggles. The economic angle of the renewed relations is manifest as Arab states seek to take advantage of the opening to Libya.

Given Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's role in resolving the Lockerbie crisis, Egypt has benefited most from the lifting of the sanctions. Qadhafi has agreed to increase the number of Egyptian guest workers in Libya beyond the existing 500,000 and has reserved some highly profitable construction projects for Egyptian firms. Tripoli and Cairo have also begun discussing a pipeline project whereby Libyan oil would be refined in and then exported from Alexandria, Egypt.

Qadhafi's munificence is not limited to Egypt, though, as he has pledged to replace many Asian workers with those from Syria and Jordan. Beyond the Arab east, Libya is also proving to be a magnet for the Gulf shaykhdoms seeking investment opportunities. Numerous trade delegations from the Gulf Cooperation Council have traveled to Tripoli and expressed an interest in investing heavily in Libya's emerging natural gas industry.

Libya's reintegration into the Middle East has not ameliorated Qadhafi's unease about his Arab brethren or his antagonism toward Israel. The colonel continues to bemoan the lack of Arab solidarity, proclaiming, "You Arabs, if you do not enter the coming century with unity, your children will have the same fate as [Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah] Ocalan." Far from acquiescing in the Oslo agreements, the colonel's hostility toward Israel remains intact as he continues to insist that "the Israelis are a disaster for the Arabs." Beyond rhetorical fulmination, Libya has sustained its support for the rejectionist Palestinian groups that share its anti-Israeli animus. The recent election of Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak has not eased the colonel's position; he insists, "Nothing will change and nothing will happen." Despite his uncompromising positions, Qadhafi's diplomacy has gained him a place at the Arab table. As long as Qadhafi refrains from overt attempts to subvert Arab regimes, it is unlikely that the Arab states will support any reimposition of sanctions.

Africa: One of the more intriguing features of Africa's current set of disputes is the emergence of Qadhafi as one of the continent's leading mediators. The colonel has attempted to resolve the Great Lakes crisis, the Ethiopia-Eritrea

border conflict, and the civil wars in Sudan and Sierra Leone. Once more, Lockerbie features prominently in Qadhafi's calculations. The colonel recognizes the pivotal role that both the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and former South African president Nelson Mandela played in ending the Lockerbie impasse. In any potential political confrontation with the United States, Qadhafi will require the assistance of the nonaligned bloc, particularly the OAU. By mediating Africa's conflicts and providing aid to regional states, Qadhafi can secure an important counter-bloc to the United States and its efforts to sustain sanctions. The apex of Qadhafi's diplomatic success was reached in the recent OAU meeting, when the assembled African leaders called for the permanent lifting of the sanctions.

Conclusion: For the past six years Libya has lived under a relatively onerous sanctions regime, causing its political isolation and economic decline. The shadow of the Lockerbie affair looms large in Libya, as Qadhafi is concerned that potentially negative developments in the case could revive the sanctions and exacerbate Libya's economic distress. To prevent such a development, the colonel has embarked on a comprehensive diplomatic strategy encompassing Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Through pledges of proper behavior, high-profile mediation efforts, and lucrative commercial prospects, Qadhafi hopes to evaporate any incentive the international community may have in revisiting a divisive sanctions debate.

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