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Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Case of Libya

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Abstract

In December 2003, the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Libya) issued a statement announcing that it had agreed to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs. Some policymakers in Washington and London were quick to establish connection between Libya's decision and the US-led war in Iraq (2003). Since then, Libya has been presented as a model for other potential proliferators to follow. This article rejects these two propositions. Instead, it argues that the dramatic transition in Libya's stand on WMD can be explained by a cluster of factors – leadership and ideology, economic and political domestic developments, relations with Western powers, and security considerations. The combination of these factors is unique. It is unlikely that the Libyan experience will be repeated in other countries.

Keywords: Green Book, *Libya*, *Non-Proliferation Treaty*, *security*, *succession*, *terrorism*, *weapons of mass destruction (WMD)*

On 19 December 2003, the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Libya) issued a statement, announcing that it had been conducting talks with the United States and the United Kingdom about WMD. The Libyan government confirmed that it had, of its own free will, agreed to get rid of the substances, equipment and programs that could lead to the production of internationally banned weapons. Specifically, Tripoli pledged to:

- declare all nuclear activities to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and sign the Additional Protocol (under the AP states are required to make expanded, comprehensive declarations of all their nuclear material and nuclear-related activities);
- eliminate ballistic missiles beyond a 300 km range with a payload of 500 kg;
- eliminate all chemical weapons stocks and munitions and accede to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC); and
- allow immediate inspections and monitoring to verify all of these actions.¹

This announcement was preceded by equally significant steps to end Libya's international isolation and pave the way for Tripoli to rejoin the global economic and diplomatic system.² In March 2003, Libya's intelligence chief Musa Kusa – one of Qadhafi's most trusted aides – approached officials in the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) to express his government's desire to initiate talks with Britain and



the United States about Libya's WMD programs. Britain immediately informed the Bush administration of Libya's request and began negotiations between the three parties that lasted for nine months. In the course of these negotiations in October 2003 the US, UK, German and Italian governments worked together to arrange the diversion of a shipment of centrifuge components bound for Libya. These components, manufactured in Malaysia, had been secretly purchased on the international nuclear black market from the illicit Pakistan-based nuclear smuggling network headed by Abdal-Qadir Khan. American and British officials claimed that the seizure convinced the Libyan leadership that the West already knew a great deal about Libya's secret nuclear weapons program and that it could not escape detection. Other reports claimed that the Libyans alerted Washington and London to the ship as a gesture of their good faith.³ Negotiations picked up pace after the seizure.

The outcome of these negotiations won praise from around the world. Naturally, London and Washington claimed the credit. European, Chinese, Russian, Iranian, and Arab leaders critical of the war in Iraq hailed the move as an indication of how effective diplomatic means could be without the need to use military power.⁴ Israel also expressed cautious support for the Libyan decision.⁵ Following this dramatic announcement several IAEA inspection teams as well as US and British weapons specialists visited Libya where they were given access to all facilities, provided with substantial documentation about WMD programs, and allowed to take samples and photographs. In other words, Libya showed a great deal of transparency and openness.

According to US government sources the process of eliminating Libya's WMD capabilities was divided into three phases.⁶ The first phase involved removing some of the key material that was of greatest proliferation risk on a priority basis. This included nuclear weapons design documents (such as the ones provided by the Pakistani scientist Abd al-Qadir Khan), uranium hexafluoride, key centrifuges and equipment, and parts of Scud-C missiles to make them inoperable. In the second phase the focus was on eliminating the remaining elements of Libya's programs. The American and British teams removed a large amount of material and equipment from the nuclear and missile programs and the Libyans destroyed chemical munitions. The goal of the third phase was verification. The US and British experts interviewed their Libyan counterparts in order to understand and assess the extent of the WMD programs and the networks supporting them. Following these three phases, in a testimony before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Human Rights, Paula A. DeSutter, Assistant Secretary for Verification and Compliance, stated, 'We have verified with reasonable certainty that Libya has eliminated, or has set in place the elimination of all its WMD and Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) class missile programs.'⁷ In another testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary DeSutter stated that Libya's work to implement its December commitments 'has been outstanding'⁸ and that Tripoli's decision 'stands as a model for other proliferators to mend their ways and help restore themselves to international legitimacy'.⁹

It is important to point out that Libya's implementation of the agreement to dismantle its WMD programs was rewarded by improving relations with Western powers. At the completion of each phase of the elimination process the United States took steps to enhance its decades-long troubled economic and diplomatic ties with Libya.¹⁰ These steps included lifting travel restrictions, allowing US firms to negotiate contracts for their return to Libya, terminating the Iran–Libya Sanctions Act with respect to Libya, issuing a general license for trade and investment, upgrading diplomatic relationships, unfreezing Libyan assets, and permitting aviation trade. Full diplomatic relations between Washington and Tripoli were finally restored in May 2006.¹¹

In addition to the US and British roles in eliminating Libya's WMD capabilities and missiles programs, international institutions, notably the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the IAEA, had been heavily involved in understanding and assessing Tripoli's efforts, providing technical assistance and verifying the full implementation of the December 2003 agreement.

Some policymakers in Washington and London were quick to establish a connection between Libya's decision to abandon its WMD program and the US-led war in Iraq (2003). For example, US Vice-President Dick Cheney said, 'Five days after we captured Saddam Hussein, Qadhafi came forward and announced that he was going to surrender all of his nuclear materials to the United States.'¹² The British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon stated, 'We showed after Saddam failed to cooperate with the UN that we meant business and Libya will draw that lesson.'¹³ In other words, fearful of the American and British troops that toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, Qadhafi decided to end his efforts to build these weapons. The argument in this article does not agree with this reasoning.¹⁴ Instead, this dramatic transition in Libya's stand on WMD in general and nuclear weapons in particular can be explained by a cluster of factors – political, economic, and strategic – that initiated an interest in these weapons systems and, a few decades later, changed the perception of their utility. After a brief review of Libya's WMD programs, the rest of this study examines these factors, particularly leadership and ideology, economic and political domestic developments, relations with Western powers, and security considerations. In short, the article argues that the Libyan leadership decided to trade its largely underdeveloped WMD program for a broad integration into the global system. This decision was driven mainly by indigenous changes fueled by increasing pressure from the international community.

An overview of Libya's weapons of mass destruction

In 1971 Libya became a party to the 1925 Geneva Protocol which forbids the use of chemical and biological weapons in wars. Despite Tripoli's commitments, there are allegations that it used chemical weapons against Chad in 1987. These allegations, according to some analysts, have not been substantiated.¹⁵ Libya is also reported to have built three chemical weapons facilities in Rabta, Sebha, and Tarhuna in the

1980s and 1990s.¹⁶ The United States threatened to use military force to block the completion of the Tarhuna plant.

The CWC came into force in April 1997. Libya, like some other Arab countries, refused to sign the CWC in protest against Israel's rejection to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, shortly after the December 2003 agreement with the United States and Britain, Libya signed the Chemical Weapons Convention in January 2004. In response to the Libyan government's request for technical support, a team of experts from the OPCW, led by Director-General Rogelio Pflirter, started working closely with senior Libyan officials to ensure the effective and comprehensive implementation of the chemical weapons ban. In March 2004, Tripoli provided the OPCW with an initial declaration of all its chemical weapons. The stockpile consisted of approximately 23 metric tons of mustard gas, one defunct chemical weapons production facility, and two chemical weapons storage facilities.¹⁷ Inspectors from the OPCW verified the complete destruction of Libya's entire declared stockpile. Accordingly, Pflirter noted that Libya was 'in full compliance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention'.¹⁸

Libya became party to the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC) in 1982, but the convention's lack of verification procedures precludes compliance verification.¹⁹ Thus, questions have remained as to whether Tripoli has been complying with the agreement. However, many arms specialists believe that if Libya had a biological weapons program at all, the effort was very primitive. Reported foreign assistance, particularly from South Africa in the mid-1990s, did not improve Tripoli's biological warfare capabilities.²⁰ Indeed, the US and British specialists who inspected Libya's facilities found no evidence of an existing biological weapons program.²¹ Furthermore, Libya did not succeed in developing munitions.

Libya's ballistic missile arsenal was comprised of Scud-Bs (300 km, 7 kg payload) acquired from the former Soviet Union, a handful of North Korean Scud-Cs (600 km, 700 kg payload), and a 500–700 km range indigenous missile program under development, called Al Fatah.²² The Al Fatah program reportedly continued throughout the 1990s, although hampered by international sanctions. Since the early 1970s Tripoli had sought to acquire and develop short- and medium-range missile capabilities in cooperation with several companies from Germany,²³ China, the Soviet Union, and North Korea. These efforts, however, had been largely unsuccessful due to international sanctions and heavy Western pressure. Libya signed the International Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (ICOC) in November 2002. Since December 2003, Libya has also pledged to abide by the MTCR guidelines, which means eliminating ballistic missiles with a range exceeding 300 km and a payload of 500 kg or more. It also agreed to convert its Scud-B arsenal into shorter-range defensive missiles.²⁴

After seizing power in 1969 the Qadhafi regime sent conflicting signals regarding its nuclear weapons aspirations.²⁵ While still under the conservative pro-Western monarchy, Libya had signed the NPT in July 1968. Libya became a party to the treaty in May 1975, and its Safeguards Agreement pursuant to the NPT entered

into force in July 1980. In 1996 Libya signed the Treaty of Pelindaba, an African-nuclear-weapon-free-zone agreement, along with another 48 African nations. According to the treaty the African states pledge not to conduct research on, develop, test, or stockpile nuclear explosive devices; prohibit the stationing of nuclear devices on their territories; maintain the highest standards of protection of nuclear materials, facilities, and equipment; and prohibit the dumping of radioactive waste. Meanwhile, in September 1996, when the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was open for signature at the General Assembly of the United Nations, Tripoli voted against it on the grounds that it did not set a deadline for nuclear disarmament. Several years later (2001) Libya signed the CTBT and ratified it in January 2004. Two months later, Libya signed the Additional Protocol.

Despite the signing of these treaties Libya did pursue an ambition to build a nuclear weapons capability. Given Tripoli's relatively low level of technological development, the country focused on foreign sources, particularly Russia, China, Pakistan, and some Western companies. Shortly after overthrowing the monarchy in 1969, the new leadership sought, unsuccessfully, to buy nuclear weapons from China.²⁶ In 1975 the Soviet Union agreed to supply Libya with a nuclear research center that was built in Tajura outside Tripoli. The Soviets provided both the Tajura reactor and its fuel. It became operational in 1983 and has since been subject to IAEA inspection.²⁷

Libya also established close cooperation with Pakistan. Several sources report that during the 1970s Libya assisted Pakistan in acquiring access to uranium ore concentrate from neighboring Niger.²⁸ In the 1990s and the early 2000s Libya received nuclear technology, equipment, and designs from the Pakistani scientist Abd al-Qadir Khan. According to recent revelations the Pakistani scientist provided Libya with what amounts to a blueprint of how to make a nuclear bomb.²⁹

Since the December 2003 agreement between Libya, the US, and the UK, the IAEA has taken a leading role in understanding Libya's nuclear activities and verifying the dismantling of its nuclear program. This close cooperation between the Libyan authorities and the IAEA has revealed significant information on Tripoli's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons capabilities that lasted for three decades. In December 2003, Libya provided the IAEA with a detailed description of its nuclear activities that had not been previously reported to the agency. This has been followed by a series of meetings between officials from both sides and several visits by IAEA inspectors to nuclear facilities in Libya. The IAEA's documents³⁰ describe important steps the Libyan authorities had taken, including:

- Small-scale uranium conversion experiments were carried out between 1983 and 1989, and to a limited extent again after 1994 at the Tajura research center. This is the process of enriching the content of uranium through isotope separation. It is a critical component for both civil nuclear power generation and military nuclear weapons.

- In 1984 Libya ordered a modular uranium conversion facility (UCF) from a Far Eastern country. The modules arrived in Libya in 1986 and were moved to different locations due to security and secrecy considerations.
- In pursuing the development of gas centrifuge technology, a European expert assisted Libya to design a gas centrifuge for uranium enrichment in the early 1980s.
- During the 1980s Libya conducted a series of uranium conversion experiments. These experiments, however, did not include any production or use of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆). Uranium hexafluoride is a compound used in the uranium-enrichment process that produces fuel for nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons.
- Foreign experts provided centrifuge-related training at locations in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. In nature uranium contains less than 1 percent of the fissile uranium 235. A nuclear explosive needs uranium enriched to at least 20 percent U-235. One technique to enrich uranium uses gas centrifuges. Training was provided on power systems, mass spectrometers, welding, gas handling, quality control, computerized machining techniques, and heat treatment of materials.
- A group of Libyan scientists studied fluorine chemistry in a foreign country in the mid-1980s.
- In July 1995 Libya made a strategic decision to reinvigorate its nuclear activities, including gas centrifuge uranium enrichment.
- In September 2000 and February 2001 Libya received UF₆ from North Korea.
- In 2002 Libya imported uranium compounds from a foreign country for use as standards in chemical laboratories, but failed to report them to the IAEA.³¹

Several conclusions can be drawn from this brief survey of Libya's chemical, biological, and nuclear programs as well as its missile capabilities. First, Libya's technological capabilities and infrastructure are very limited and underdeveloped compared with other regional powers such as Iran or Iraq before the 1991 Gulf War. Accordingly, the country's efforts to build WMD capabilities largely rested on foreign suppliers. In other words, in terms of material, equipment, and expertise, Libya relied heavily on foreign countries to acquire non-conventional capabilities. Second, this lack of an indigenous base and the heavy dependence on foreign sources made it easier for the West to constrain efforts to obtain WMD capabilities. Third, American and British specialists who inspected Libya's facilities did not find concrete evidence of biological-weapons-related efforts. Fourth, these inspectors and officials from the IAEA found Libya in breach of its obligation to comply with the NPT. However, Libya's nuclear program was in a very early stage of development and still years away from being able to produce a bomb. Fifth, the series of inspections carried out since December 2003 has not led to the identification of specific facilities involved in nuclear weapon component design, manufacturing, or testing. No interaction took place between the Libyan institution in charge of the nuclear weapons program (the National Board for Scientific Research) and the organization responsible for

the missile activities (Central Organization for Electronic Research). Sixth, Libya has cooperated with the US and British inspectors and with IAEA officials by providing prompt access to all suspected locations of WMD activities, by making senior personnel available, and by taking corrective action to comply with the December 2003 agreement. In return, these officials have praised Tripoli's cooperation and transparency.

Proliferation dynamics: forces that shaped Tripoli's stand on WMD

There are no indications that Libya had tried to acquire non-conventional military capability under the monarchy. As discussed earlier, since 1969 Qadhafi's regime has sought to buy or manufacture different types of WMD, with limited success. In the early 2000s, the Libyan leaders reached the conclusion that their country would be better off without these weapons. Put differently, the Libyan leaders became convinced that the economic and political rewards of renouncing WMD exceeded the potential military benefits of these weapons. Several internal and external forces had contributed to this strategic transition. The list includes security; relations with the West; leadership and ideology; and domestic economic and political changes.

Security

Since the 1969 coup the Libyan leadership's perception of regional security has played a significant role in the efforts to build WMD programs and the decision to dismantle them. For almost two decades Libya was militarily involved in neighboring Chad. In the early 1970s Libya began supporting the anti-government rebels of the Front for the National Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT), and in 1973 Libya occupied the Azou Strip in northern Chad, believed to be rich in mineral deposits. Tripoli's involvement in Chad was further intensified during the civil war between Chadian President Goukouni Queddei and his Minister of Defense Hussein Habre.³² The former was supported by Libya, while the latter was backed by France and other African countries, particularly Egypt and Sudan. After several military setbacks Libyan troops withdrew from Chad in 1987 and the two countries agreed to observe a cease-fire proposed by the Organization of African Unity. Libya's involvement in Chad can be explained by its desire to expand influence south into sub-Saharan Africa and also its strategic and commercial interest in the potentially mineral-rich region. However, this adventure failed and proved costly both in terms of resources and human lives.

Further from home but more central to Qadhafi's ideology and Libya's policy was the Arab-Israeli conflict. The defeat of the Arab countries in the 1967 war against Israel was a 'searing blow to Qadhafi's nationalist and pan-Arab pride'.³³ The failure of King Idris to support Egypt in this war had further intensified nationalist feeling and resentment toward the monarchy. Upon taking power, Qadhafi adopted a uncompromising militant stand against Israel. Most Libyan Jews left the country and received no compensation for the loss of their property. Qadhafi believed that

Western powers created Israel in the midst of the Arab world to keep the Arabs divided and weak. Accordingly, the way to achieve Arab unity and glory was to destroy the Jewish state. Within this context, the Arabs needed nuclear weapons equal to the ones Israel is believed to possess.

Qadhafi accused Arab governments of not doing enough to 'liberate Palestine'. Instead, he argued, they were interested in recovering the territories lost in the 1967 war. Qadhafi also accused the Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat of abandoning the armed struggle. Tripoli's response was to lead the opposition to a peaceful solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict, give financial aid to various Palestinian organizations, and open camps to train Palestinian guerrillas.

Libya's stand on the Arab–Israeli conflict has substantially softened since the early 2000s. In October 2004 a group of former Libyan Jews visited Libya and met with Qadhafi.³⁴ The Libyan leader also stopped talking about the destruction of Israel and instead has articulated a new vision for ending the conflict. He believes that 'the narrow area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea cannot possibly be enough for two states, a Jewish and a Palestinian. The solution is the foundation of one, single democratic state.'³⁵ This secular and federal state would be open to the return of both Palestinians and Jews, with equal rights for all.³⁶

This new stand on the Arab–Israeli conflict suggests that Qadhafi has realized that he does not need to be more radical than the majority of Palestinians, who recognized the state of Israel and accepted a peaceful solution to the conflict. It also suggests that the Libyan leader has concluded that the survival of his regime does not depend on fiery slogans such as the 'liberation of Palestine' or the 'annihilation of Israel'. Rather, a thriving economy and reintegration in the international community would provide better guarantees for survival and legitimacy.³⁷

Leadership and ideology

On 1 September 1969 Mummar al-Qadhafi led a bloodless military coup that overthrew the monarchy and established a new political system. King Idris, a traditional religious leader, had led Libya from independence in 1951 and had adopted a pro-Western conservative policy.³⁸ Under Qadhafi, a Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) was formed which took control of the country. Qadhafi and his colleagues on the RCC shared similar social and economic backgrounds and political motivations and goals. Most of them came from poor families and attended the Libyan military academy. Military education and careers provided low-income Libyans with an opportunity for upward economic and social mobility. Qadhafi, born in 1942, had an entirely Arabic and strongly Islamic education, much of it under Egyptian teachers. Shortly after graduating from the Libyan Military Academy he was selected for several months of further training at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, England.

In their formative years, Qadhafi and his colleagues on the RCC closely followed the dramatic political developments in neighboring Arab countries, particularly the rise of President Gamal Abd al-Nasser in Egypt, his confrontations with Israel and the West, and his call for Arab unity. Indeed, Nasser became Qadhafi's hero and idol

and the Egyptian revolutionary path was seen as the model for the new regime in Tripoli. Initially, the RCC did not present a coherent political program to address Libya's domestic and foreign policies. In the 1970s, however, Qadhafi articulated his ideological framework in several interviews, speeches, and documents, most notably the *Green Book*.

The *Green Book* was issued in three volumes: first, *The Solution of the Problem of Democracy: The Authority of the People* (1975); second, *The Solution of the Economic Problem: Socialism* (1977); and, third, *The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory* (1978). Together, these three volumes present general guidelines to the drastic transformation of Libyan society and policy. They combine socialism, Arab nationalism, and progressive Islam. The main themes of Qadhafi's ideological framework, as they were documented in the *Green Book* and in other revolutionary proclamations, can be summarized as follows.

Arab unity The principal forces underlying the Libyan policy, particularly in the early years of the revolution, were undoubtedly professed Arab nationalism and an urgent desire to create a united Arab nation immediately. Qadhafi believed that the Arab nation was underdeveloped due to the long reign of the Turks, which was followed by European occupation. Imperialistic powers, the argument goes, created Israel in the midst of the Arab world to divert the region's resources and keep it weak and divided. Based on these principles, Libya was involved in several schemes to merge or unite with neighboring Arab states including Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, and Tunisia.

None of these schemes was successful. Arab leaders endorsed the idea of Arab unity in principle but thought socio-economic and political conditions were not ripe for putting it into practice. Arab unity, they argued, should come at the end of a long process of historical evolution. Thus mutual suspicion characterized relations between Qadhafi and most other Arab heads of state. Qadhafi was convinced that the existing Arab governments would not allow the Arab masses to fulfill the goal of Arab unity. 'Only a direct democracy rising on the ruins of the existing political institutions can unlock the potential among the masses for unification.'³⁹ Accordingly, Libya was involved in subversion and assassination attempts against other Arab governments and leaders. Furthermore, Libya, along with Syria, was the only Arab country to support Iran against a fellow Arab state, Iraq, in the 1980–8 war.

Third International Theory In May 1973 Qadhafi presented his Third International Theory, which he considered as an alternative to both capitalist materialism and communist atheism. The theory rejected the class exploitation of capitalism and the class warfare of communism. Instead, it advocated the elimination of class differences. Qadhafi envisioned a direct democracy in which the instruments of government were placed in the hands of the masses. Accordingly, People's Committees and popular congresses were formed at the local, regional, and national levels to promote mass participation in the decision-making process. The theory called on Third World

countries in general, and Arab states in particular, not to fall under the dominance of either the United States or the Soviet Union.

Communism was regarded as a foreign ideology antipathetic to Arab nationalism. Thus, despite acknowledging Soviet support to the Arabs and recognizing the People's Republic of China, Qadhafi helped President Numeiri of Sudan to regain power in 1971 after a coup led by communists. In other words, Qadhafi has never endorsed communism as the model for Libya and the Arabs. His close cooperation with the Soviet Union and other communist countries and movements was for pragmatic reasons (e.g. confronting imperialistic powers).

On the other hand, Qadhafi adopted a strong stand against Western powers in the early 1970s and for most of the following two decades. Shortly after toppling the monarchy, the British and Americans were pressured to accelerate their evacuation of military bases in Libya and Italian residents were expelled. Similarly, Tripoli took a strong stand in its negotiations with Western oil companies and as a result it increased its share of ownership of these companies and eventually nationalized some of them.⁴⁰

Pan-Africanism Besides attempting to play a leading role in the Arab world, Qadhafi has always considered Libya to be a vital part of sub-Saharan Africa. From the early years of the revolution Tripoli has been actively involved in African affairs. Libya's policy was originally driven by a strategy to reduce Western and Israeli influence in the continent and Qadhafi provided financial and military aid to several 'liberation movements' across Africa. In addition, Libya mediated in several conflicts between African countries. Libya also played a significant role in strengthening economic and political integration in Africa such as the Community of Sahel-Saharan States and the African Union.

Since the late 1990s two important developments have characterized Libya's role in Africa. First, unlike their Arab counterparts, African leaders were more vocal in their opposition to the international sanctions against Libya in the 1990s. In addition, Qadhafi seems to have grown frustrated with the failure of Arab regimes to respond to his calls for Arab unity and to his policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result, Libya's ties with Africa and its African identity have grown stronger. Second, Libya's reasons for involvement in Africa have been substantially altered. Since the 1990s Libya's policy in Africa has been driven by efforts to promote economic development, social prosperity, and healthcare, not to contain Western and Israeli influence, as in the past.

Qadhafi's close association with several African liberation movements and Libya's efforts to fight colonialism in the continent have substantially improved Libya's image. In addition, Qadhafi's warm relations with former South African President Nelson Mandela give him more prestige and clout.⁴¹

Changes in the perception of the leadership Qadhafi's ideological framework consists of a 'heterogeneous collection of ideas, beliefs, and myths which constitute

in the broadest sense a plan of political action'.⁴² This plan – with an authoritarian political regime implementing state-led economic strategy and pursuing aggressive foreign policy – seems to have achieved little success. In the late 1990s economic conditions were deteriorating, feeding growing political dissatisfaction and opposition. Internationally, Libya was under comprehensive sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council and observed by most states. These internal and external challenges suggested that a 'business as usual' approach was not an option. Fundamental changes were needed; otherwise the regime's survival would be in doubt. In response, Qadhafi had to reinvent himself.

By the mid-1990s Qadhafi began referring to himself as the 'Philosopher of the Revolution' and no longer the head of state.⁴³ This does not mean his hold on power was weakened. Rather, it underscores his perception of himself and his role in Libya and on the international scene. Qadhafi has always seen himself as a revolutionary and visionary leader and he used his country's massive oil revenues to foster his revolutionary ideas. In the late 1990s the pragmatic Qadhafi realized that his ideas had been largely rejected and he decided to change course in both domestic and foreign policies.

Several Western-educated Libyans have been assigned the responsibility of changing the country's image both at home and abroad.⁴⁴ Equally important, Qadhafi's son, Saif al-Islam, has been a champion of moderation and has been increasingly seen as the voice of his father's changing regime. In contrast to his father's traditional Arabic and Islamic education, Saif al-Islam has an undergraduate degree in architecture and urban planning from a Libyan university and a master's degree in business management from an Austrian university. He is familiar with Western culture and, unlike his father, 'does not seem to be burdened by adverse emotional baggage or contempt for Western imperialism'.⁴⁵ Saif al-Islam does not hold any official position in the government, but chairs the Qadhafi International Association for Charitable Organizations, which he founded in 1997.⁴⁶ Since the late 1990s Saif al-Islam has emerged as a central figure in Libya's policy. He is reported to be a major force in Libya's decision to end its association with international terrorism and to rid itself of WMD programs.⁴⁷

Domestic economic and political changes

Upon independence in 1951 Libya was one of the poorest countries in the world, depending heavily on foreign aid. This extreme poverty was soon to change with the discovery of huge oil deposits in the mid-1950s. Within a few years Libya enjoyed one of the highest gross national products in Africa. Thus, on the eve of the 1969 coup Libya was a wealthy country with a small population. Three decades later (the late 1990s) economic conditions were deteriorating, with stagnant economic growth and high unemployment rates. Several factors contributed to this poor economic performance: first, heavy state intervention, which caused widespread corruption and mismanagement; second, stable oil prices at a low level from the mid-1980s through most of the 1990s; third, lack of political will and institutional capacity to introduce

and pursue economic reform; fourth, costly military adventures with few or negative economic and political benefits; and, fifth, international sanctions that confirmed and sharpened the country's isolation and highlighted its status as a 'rogue state'.

The combination of these developments left the political leadership with few options in the early 2000s. It is also important to consider the international and regional contexts in the late 1990s and early 2000s which were drastically different from those that prevailed in the early years of the 1969 coup. The collapse of the Soviet Union did not only mean the loss of a superpower's support, but equally importantly it discredited the Soviet model of state intervention. Thus the bilateral international system was replaced by a new one, with the United States as the dominant military power. Furthermore, international norms have changed, reflecting the fundamental alteration of the international system. The colonial era is over and the struggle for national liberation has faded away in favor of global economic integration.

Regionally, the Palestinians and some Arab countries were talking to the Israelis directly or indirectly. These talks were often unsuccessful, but they highlighted a fundamental departure from the past: the great majority of Arabs have accepted the fact that Israel is a part of the Middle East landscape. The mere existence of Israel is less disputed. Rather, the conflict is focused on the territories occupied in the 1967 war and how to coexist with the Jewish state.⁴⁸ Finally, Saddam Hussein, one of the last Arab leaders to resist American influence in the Arab world, was fighting a losing battle for his regime's survival.

Given these domestic, regional, and international developments, Qadhafi opted to take responsibility for his past policies and practices. He also accepted the new norms and started cooperating with international organizations to rid Libya of WMD programs.⁴⁹ The rest of this section examines domestic economic and political developments that contributed to this outcome.

The remaking of Libyan society that Qadhafi envisioned began shortly after he consolidated power in the early 1970s. Politically, Qadhafi believed in empowering people through direct democracy. Thus, a 'Cultural Revolution' was initiated in 1973, and four years later the official name of the country was changed to the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Republic of the Masses). Public mobilization was carried out by the Arab Socialist Union – the country's only permitted political party. People's Committees were created and became responsible for local and regional administration. Qadhafi urged them to challenge traditional authority and to take over and run public affairs. The RCC was replaced by the General People's Congress – a national representative body. Similarly, the General People's Committee replaced the Council of Ministers.

Economically, Libya opted for a socialist state and a command economy. A major goal of the economic system was to redistribute oil income more equitably to benefit the previously disadvantaged sectors of society. In order to achieve this goal, the government adopted a centralized socialist approach. Qadhafi urged Libyan workers to liberate themselves from the slavery imposed by their employers and to become full 'partners, not wage earners'.⁵⁰ In response, workers took control of a large number of private companies and turned them into state-run enterprises. Rhetoric

aside, the state expanded its control over almost all economic sectors. State-owned 'people's supermarkets' replaced retail and wholesale trading operations. Similarly the development of both heavy and light industry was centrally controlled. 'Only rural land remained outside the socialist structure.'⁵¹

As in many other countries, the command economy and heavy state intervention did not succeed.⁵² Corruption, favoritism, unemployment, and underemployment characterized Libya's economy. By the late 1980s Qadhafi and other top Libyan officials decided to change course and introduce some measures of economic liberalization. These changes, however, were half-hearted and never fully implemented. A broad implementation of economic reform strategy and privatizing public enterprises would have weakened state control over the economic system and raised doubts over the legitimacy of the regime and its social and economic policies. Furthermore, despite economic stagnation Libya still enjoyed 'relatively high levels of oil revenues that allowed the government to "buy" cooperation from the population'.⁵³ Put differently, oil revenues meant that the government did not take severe economic measures to address economic stagnation and to avoid economic reform.

Unlike Persian Gulf oil producers such as Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, where oil was discovered early in the twentieth century, oil was not discovered in Libya until the late 1950s. Yet in a short period of time oil was brought on-stream, particularly from the Sirte Basin. Thus, by the late 1960s, Libya had become the world's fourth-largest exporter of crude oil.⁵⁴ The rush to raise production in Libya reflected not only the world's growing appetite for oil but also certain advantages the Libyan oil sector enjoys. First, Tripoli holds huge proven oil reserves estimated at 39 billion barrels, or 3.3 percent of the world's total.⁵⁵ Second, production costs are among the lowest in the world. Third, Libya produces high-quality, low-sulfur 'sweet' crude oil. Fourth, the proximity of Libya to Europe is a big advantage in terms of ease and cost of transportation.

Given these advantages, it is little wonder that American and European oil companies were heavily involved in exploring and producing oil in Libya. The country's oil production reached a peak of 3.32 million barrels per day (b/d) in 1970. The high level of production, however, proved unsustainable. Sanctions and political isolation took their toll. In 2003 Libya produced 1.488 million b/d – less than half its production in 1970. This decline can be explained more by political factors than geological ones. Bilateral sanctions in the 1980s and multilateral ones in the 1990s deprived Libya's oil industry of the spare parts, new equipment, modern technology, management techniques, and foreign investment badly needed to maintain and upgrade its production capacity.

Two important intertwined characteristics of Libya's oil policy should be highlighted. First, like many other oil-producing countries, Libya is heavily dependent on oil revenues. Efforts to diversify the economy have not been successful. This heavy dependence on one single commodity has made Libya more vulnerable to economic sanctions. Libyan officials realize the country's urgent need for foreign investment to upgrade and modernize oil infrastructure and expand production capacity. Second, oil is Libya's source of power. Since 1969 Qadhafi has used oil revenues

to buy political quietness at home, to fund an ambitious foreign policy, and build conventional and non-conventional military capability.⁵⁶ The severe shortage of oil revenues because of low oil prices and sanctions during most of the 1990s exerted pressure on the Libyan government to fundamentally change its policy.

Four conclusions can be drawn from this discussion of economic and political changes in Libya since the 1969 coup. First, the evolution of Libya's economic and political systems has proven confusing and unpredictable. Qadhafi has sought to empower the masses through direct democracy and economic partnership between employers and employees, but the outcome has been disappointing. As Dirk Vandewalle argues, 'Beneath the rhetoric of popular rule and popular management ... Libyans were politically and economically disenfranchised.'⁵⁷ Another analyst concludes that the system Qadhafi created proved to be 'better at promulgating top-level policy than it was at cultivating popular participation'.⁵⁸

Second, since the early 2000s the pace of reform has progressed and some advances have been made. Libyan officials have requested technical assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to help them formulate plans to reform the economy. Foreign investment was invited, particularly in the country's hydrocarbon sector, and a privatization plan was initiated, which involved the sale of hundreds of public enterprises to the private sector. In addition, tariff rates were reduced and some state import monopolies were eliminated. However, according to the IMF these reforms continue to be implemented in 'an ad hoc and nontransparent manner, and their pace and effectiveness are affected by serious human capacity constraints'.⁵⁹

Third, Libyan officials agree that a significant scaling down of the dominant role of the public sector, and the development of the private sector, are important. However, they argue that given the country's political structure, their preferred approach to reform is 'a one-sector-at-a-time piecemeal approach'.⁶⁰ This suggests that Libya, like other Middle Eastern countries, is likely to follow the so-called Chinese model: a relatively open economic system steered by a politically repressive regime.⁶¹

Fourth, the slow but unmistakable domestic economic and political reforms have had a significant impact on Tripoli's foreign policy. The more integrated Libya becomes in the global economic system, the more likely it will be to play by the global norms and rules. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other international financial institutions are playing a growing role in promoting economic reform in Libya. The volume of trade and foreign investment is substantially expanding. This growing economic partnership provides Libya with incentives to adopt a constructive foreign policy and denounce WMD.

Libya's relations with the West

Bilateral relations between the United States and Libya in the first three decades following the 1969 coup were characterized by suspicion and hostility. During these 30 years relations were marked by one crisis after another. The main issues which shaped these troubled relations included Libya's close relations with the Soviet Union,

Qadhafi's fiery opposition to Israel and the peaceful resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict, US interests in securing oil supplies from Libya, Qadhafi's involvement in international terrorism, and his attempt to acquire and develop WMD.

The United States had very good relations with Libya under King Idris in the 1950s and 1960s. US foreign aid and the Wheelus Field airbase were major sources of income and employment before the oil boom.⁶² American oil companies played a significant role in exploring and developing Libya's oil deposits. Initially, after Qadhafi overthrew the monarchy, the United States adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach. The Nixon administration recognized the new government in Tripoli five days after the coup. Some officials in Washington thought that Libya could serve as a bulwark against communism in North Africa and the Middle East. Qadhafi's denunciation of communism as an atheist ideology, his support of the expulsion of Soviet advisers from Egypt, and criticism of Soviet support to India in its war against Pakistan in the early 1970s all reinforced Washington's expectations of an anti-Soviet regime in Tripoli. Within this context the negotiations to evacuate the British Al-Adem military base and the US Wheelus Field airbase went relatively smoothly.⁶³

This relative accommodation and quietness did not last for long. The Libyan government nationalized several American oil companies and Libya, along with other Arab countries, used oil as a political weapon against the United States in the aftermath of the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Qadhafi harshly criticized the US role in this conflict and American efforts to reach permanent ceasefires between Egypt, Syria, and Israel. The Libyan leader was also involved in supporting subversion against conservative Arab governments, which he dubbed reactionary. Finally, Libya signed a major arms deal with the Soviet Union in 1974. The Soviets began shipping arms to Libya 'not only because they were annoyed at being expelled from Egypt, but because they were seeking the hard currency that the Libyan oil revenues provide'.⁶⁴

The mutual suspicion and hostility between Washington and Tripoli grew deeper during the rest of the 1970s. The United States opposed Libya's growing intervention in Africa and Qadhafi strongly objected to President Carter's efforts to make peace between Egypt and Israel. Under the Reagan administration Libyan–American relations reached their lowest point. All diplomatic and economic ties were severed. The United States froze Libya's financial assets and imposed extensive economic sanctions; American oil companies withdrew from that country. The United States shot down two Libyan aircraft over the Gulf of Sirte. The cause of these economic, diplomatic, and military confrontations between the United States and Libya was the latter's involvement in terrorist attacks against American and other Western targets.

In many ways, Libya's involvement in international terrorism is similar to that of other 'revolutionary' states. Egypt under former President Nasser (1954–70); Iran, particularly in the first decade after the 1979 revolution; and Iraq prior to the 2003 war had been indicted by Western courts and governments for carrying out terrorist attacks on Western targets and expatriate dissidents. Libya also supported Palestinian groups, as almost all other Arab countries have done at different times and for various reasons. Palestinian organizations are generally seen in the region

as liberation movements against Israeli occupation, while in the West they are seen as terrorist organizations.⁶⁵

Libya's involvement in international terrorism, however, was very different from the experiences of other countries. At least five characteristics of the Libyan case can be identified that make Libya unique, both in terms of the war on terrorism and in terms of the states that sponsor terrorist activities. First, Tripoli backed terrorist operations targeting citizens of several countries, opting for an uncommonly broad-based spectrum of political targets. In April 1984, a British policewoman, Yvonne Fletcher, was killed and 11 demonstrators were wounded when gunmen in the Libyan People's Bureau of London fired on a peaceful anti-Qadhafi demonstration outside their building. Two years later, in April 1986, three Libyan secret service employees working in their embassy in Berlin were involved in a bomb attack on a disco in which two US servicemen and a Turkish civilian woman were killed and more than 200 people were wounded. A German court found that Libyan government officials had orchestrated the attack and it convicted four of them. In retaliation, the United States bombed two Libyan cities (Tripoli and Benghazi), killing 15 people, including Qadhafi's adopted daughter.⁶⁶ Some analysts argue that in the wake of this attack the Libyan leadership came to the conclusion that it 'could no longer ignore the reality of American power'.⁶⁷ Still, the deadliest terrorist operation took place in 1988, when the Libyan intelligence service was responsible for the bombing of a Pan Am jet in which 259 passengers and crew were killed, as well as 11 residents of Lockerbie, Scotland. Finally, in September 1989, the Libyan intelligence service orchestrated the bombing of a French UTA passenger jet over Niger in which 170 people were killed. French officials named Qadhafi's brother-in-law, Muhammad Sanusi, as the mastermind behind the attack. Six Libyan suspects – all intelligence officers – were tried in absentia by a French court and convicted in 1999.⁶⁸ From these anecdotes and figures, it seems that Tripoli's involvement in terrorist activities peaked in the 1980s.

Second, most states accused of sponsoring international terrorism strongly deny such accusations. Tripoli, however, has accepted legal responsibility for several terrorist operations and paid financial compensation to the victims' families. In 1999, Libya paid compensation for the death of the British policewoman – a move that paved the way for the reopening of the British embassy in Tripoli.⁶⁹ In August 2004, Libya agreed to pay \$35 million to the victims of the 1986 attack on the La Belle disco in Germany. In January 2004, Libya agreed to pay \$170 million to the relatives of the victims of the UTA French airliner. Finally, Libya took several steps to settle the legal and political issues relating to the Lockerbie terrorist attack. In 1999, Libya surrendered two suspects – Abd al-Basset al-Megrahi and al-Amin Khalifa Fahima – for trial in Scotland. The former was convicted: not enough evidence was presented to convict the latter. In March 2003, the Libyan government took responsibility for the bombing and agreed to pay \$2.7 billion to the victims' families. Libya also admitted supplying large quantities of weapons to the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Third, besides the verdicts in French, German, and Scottish courts, the international community has been united in condemning Libya's involvement in international terrorism, and in taking specific measures to compel Tripoli to change its policy and abide by international norms. These measures were documented in several UN Security Council resolutions, particularly Resolutions 731 (1992), 748 (1992), and 883 (1993).⁷⁰ In these resolutions, the Security Council expressed deep concern over the results of investigations implicating officials of the Libyan government in the attacks against Pan Am Flight 103 and UTA Flight 772. The Security Council requested that Tripoli cooperate fully in establishing responsibility for the two attacks. The Security Council further decided that the Libyan government's failure to demonstrate by concrete actions its renunciation of terrorism constituted a threat to international peace and security. As a result, the Security Council imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions that proved very costly to Libya. According to official estimates, the sanctions resulted in economic losses of \$26.5 billion.⁷¹ When Libya agreed to cooperate and surrendered the two suspects in 1999, the sanctions were suspended and eventually lifted in 2003. This was the first time in the history of the international struggle against modern terrorism that the international community has succeeded in imposing and enforcing effective sanctions against a terrorism-sponsoring state under the auspices of the UN Security Council.⁷²

Fourth, in addition to playing a crucial role in getting Libya to abide by international norms, accept responsibility for terrorist operations, and pay financial compensation, the international sanctions helped shape a new Libyan attitude on terrorism in particular, and on foreign policy in general. Since the late 1990s, Tripoli has sought to end its international isolation, or its so-called pariah status, and to fully re-engage with the global system. Qadhafi has sought to position himself and his country as a power broker in Africa and as an economic intermediary between Europe and Africa. Tripoli has become more involved in the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue known as the Barcelona Process, which aims to promote political and economic cooperation between the European Union and southern and eastern Mediterranean states. In 2000, Libya played a high-profile role in negotiating the release of a group of foreign hostages seized in the Philippines by the Abu Sayyaf Group.⁷³ The hostages included citizens of France, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, Finland, the Philippines, and Lebanon. In 2002, Libya became a party to the 1999 Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the 1991 Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection. Thus, Tripoli became a party to all 12 international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

Fifth, the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States provided a significant opportunity for Qadhafi to align himself and his country with the international war on terrorism, as well as to strengthen his hand in fighting fundamentalist dissident groups inside Libya. Thus, shortly after the attacks of 9/11, the Libyan leader issued a statement condemning them as horrific and gruesome and urging Libyans to donate blood for US victims.⁷⁴ He declared that Libya would combat members of al-Qaeda and 'heretics', a term he used to refer to Libyan extremists

allied with al-Qaeda and opposed to his regime. Finally in early 2004, Qadhafi stated that Libyan intelligence had been sharing information on al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremists with Western intelligence services and characterized such cooperation as 'irrevocable'.⁷⁵

Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi further underscores this dramatic transformation in Libyan–American relationship. In the mid-2000s he argued that Libya 'recognizes America's special role as a superpower and that Libya is ready to transform decades of mutual antagonism into an era of genuine friendship'.⁷⁶

Like the United States, most European countries had rocky relations with Libya in the first few decades of Qadhafi's reign.⁷⁷ European governments denounced Libya's involvement in international terrorism and its attempt to acquire WMD. Despite these shared concerns on the two sides of the Atlantic, European officials disagreed with their American counterparts on how to 'handle' the Libyan leader. Generally, European leaders believed that isolating Qadhafi would make him more radical. Instead, the Europeans thought that engaging Libya would accelerate the transformation of its political system. This more flexible European approach toward Libya has been based on long and extensive historical, commercial, and strategic ties between Europe and Libya.

Several European countries have had extensive trade relations with Libya; nearly all Libyan oil is sold to European countries, including Italy, Germany, France, and Spain. Furthermore, European oil companies maintained their Libyan operations after their US rivals left in the 1980s. Following the departure of American oil companies, Agip of Italy was the major foreign oil company operating in Libya, although French, Spanish, Dutch, and British companies also had a presence there.⁷⁸

Besides these extensive commercial ties, Europe has an interest in the evolution of Libya's policy in the Mediterranean and Africa. Increasingly Libya has been seen as a major player in European efforts to contain illegal immigration from Africa.⁷⁹ European countries want Libya to patrol its coastline effectively and stop the thousands of illegal migrants who try to reach Europe by sea each month.

Conclusion

The December 2003 announcement that Libya had agreed to rid itself of WMD programs, and to fully cooperate with the United States, the United Kingdom, and international organizations to verify the implementation of this new policy, has created a twofold impression. First, the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime was a driving force for Qadhafi's dramatic change. In other words, scared of facing the same fate as Saddam, Qadhafi decided to cooperate with the US and the UK. Second, the peaceful transformation of Tripoli's policy on WMD suggests that Libya should serve as an example for other potential proliferators in the Middle East, and indeed in the rest of the world. This study rejects these two propositions. Libya's gradual acceptance of international norms started several years before the 2003 war in Iraq. Furthermore, several conclusions can be drawn from Libya's experiment with WMD.

First, Libya is not the only Middle Eastern country to seek WMD capabilities. Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Syria have sought different combinations of these non-conventional weapons. Libya, however, is the only country in the region to admit seeking these capabilities and to be fully transparent in destroying them, without the use of military force. Second, the fundamental change in Libya's policy from a 'pariah state' to a responsible member in the international community was, to a great extent, in response to a deepening economic crisis worsened by stagnant oil prices and extensive economic sanctions. Libya's economy is heavily dependent on oil revenues and is one of the least diversified economies in the Middle East. This made the country more vulnerable to economic sanctions. The rest of the world needed to stop buying this one commodity to make sanctions effective. In other words, the Libyan experience suggests that the less diversified the economy, the more likely sanctions are to succeed.

Third, security has been the major drive to acquire WMD in several Middle Eastern countries. Leaders in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Israel strongly believed that their respective states were facing tremendous threats from regional rivals or the United States. They also perceived that WMD in general and nuclear weapons in particular would protect them and neutralize these threats. Libya's national security, on the other hand, was never threatened by a regional rival. Libya's involvement in Chad, a much weaker state, was not driven by the need to ensure the survival of the regime in Tripoli. Similarly, Libya's stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict was more to satisfy ideological ambition and less to alleviate national security concerns. In short, Libya does not face an existential threat.

Finally, despite Libya's efforts to acquire non-conventional capabilities for almost three decades, it achieved only a modest success. The country's indigenous technical infrastructure was very underdeveloped (compared with Iran, for example). Libya's nuclear program was in a very early stage. Renouncing it brought an end to economic sanctions and the normalization of relations with Western countries. As Robert Hunter concludes, 'Qadhafi made his move and has been richly rewarded at no palpable cost to Libyan security or prestige. He sold his white elephant at the right price at the right time.'⁸⁰

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