WORLD PEACE FOUNDATION

Libya in its African Context

Seminar Note

15 – 16 November 2012

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

The WPF Seminar Series

The World Peace Foundation, an operating foundation affiliated solely with The Fletcher School, aims to provide intellectual leadership on issues of peace, justice and security. It believes that innovative research and teaching are critical to the challenges of making peace around the world, and should go hand-in-hand with advocacy and practical engagement with the toughest issues. It regularly convenes expert seminars to address today's most pressing issues. The seminar, "Libya in its African Context" was held November 15-16, 2012.

This seminar note is organized around prominent themes that emerged throughout the seminar. Participants' responses were non-attributable for a more thorough discussion.

OVERVIEW

In the flurry of assessments and debates about the 2011 war in Libya that overthrew the country's longtime ruler, Muammar Gaddafi, there has been little scholarly or policy attention to Libya's relationship with sub-Saharan Africa during and after the conflict. Convening area experts for a combination of public and closed-door discussions over two days, the World Peace Foundation aimed to reverse this neglect.

Key areas of discussion of post-conflict issues included:

- How uncertainty on many issues within Libya's new political dispensation impact internal and international matters; and
- Libya's current turn away from sub-Saharan Africa.

Previously untold or under-examined linkages during the armed conflict were also explored:

- The African Union's efforts to find a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict;
- The scale and significance of Sudanese support for the National Transitional Council (NTC) in 2011; and
- The roles of other key countries, Chad, Algeria and Qatar, specifically.

Participants also discussed the on-going conflict in Mali, which is related to upheaval in Libya, but also fed by its particular national dynamics.

After the fall: Libya and Africa in the Post-Gaddafi Period

Libya's Internal Politics

While Libya's internal affairs were not the main focus of the seminar, the country's current domestic situation was a recurrent theme. In the public session, "Libya today," the panelists addressed the challenges of developing a new constitution and security issues, including controlling the militias. While the international press tends to focus on day-to-day newsworthy events, which by definition include principally items of bad news, both presenters noted that the overall trends in Libya are positive.

Libya must be seen in the context of the Arab Spring and the demand for democracy. The Libyan revolution, like its counterparts to east and west, was a "dignity revolution" and the people, now empowered, will not so easily be dominated by abusive rulers again. While elections in Tunisia and Egypt were won by Islamist parties, in Libya, the Islamists won less than 10% of the popular vote, rendering unnecessary the special electoral measures designed to limit the influence of any one party. More notable has been the emergence of new hybrid identities cutting across the established ideological markers, bringing together Islamists and liberals in coalition. Liberals are defending the right of Islamists to be at the table, and Islamists are taking on nationalist colors.

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Further, Libyan Islamism is characterized by two contradictory trends among the Salafists. One trend is hardcore, including the destruction of Sufi shrines. The other trend is towards playing the political game, and reaching out to others.

Several participants noted the numerous localized and brief conflicts across the country involving militias. There was some controversy over whether these localized outbreaks of violence are truly being resolved through an emerging Libyan style of moderation and consensus building, or whether the mediation efforts merely result in short-term truces, after which the violence is destined to erupt again. In any case, Libya is a nation in arms and many of the militia are simply armed citizens, but the potentially destabilizing effect of the flood of arms across the country remains an unsettling factor. The absence of a national army presents the country with both an opportunity and a challenge. Libya might build a truly national force from scratch, avoiding the problems associated with entrenched military establishments that bedevil democratic transitions elsewhere. But this is, as one participant noted, a long-term project--building a professional army can take up to twenty years.

Turning Away from Africa

Over modern history, the relationship between Libya and sub-Saharan Africa has been checkered. There are important historic links across the Sahara, especially associated with the Sanussiya of Cyrenaica. Also, nomadic groups in the Fezzan, including the Toubou and Tuareg, range into the neighboring countries. In modern times, Libyan-African relations were closely identified with the person of Muammar Gaddafi. Rebuffed by Arab leaders, Gaddafi turned towards Africa and tried to buy influence, while also promoting grandiose visions of himself as the leader of the continent. His military adventurism in the continent included support both for legitimate liberation movements (such as the South Africa's ANC) and for insurgents.

Libya cannot ignore sub-Saharan Africa. It shares concerns with its regional neighbors over the proliferation of weapons, trafficking of people across the Sahara, and use of smuggling routes for illicit commodities such as drugs.

Today, in post-Gaddafi Libya, there is a popular perception that as a result of this largesse sub-Saharan Africans in general, and the African Union (AU) in particular, supported Gaddafi. As a cause or perhaps a consequence of this perception, during the conflict that overthrew Gaddafi many black Libyans fighting on behalf of the former leader were stigmatized as "African mercenaries." This may have been because Libyans did not want to acknowledge that their compatriots were committing violations of human rights. The sum effect is that Libyans in the post-Gaddafi context are leaning away from Africa, albeit with important exceptions such as those countries that actively supported the NTC.

Nonetheless, geography cannot be overcome. For a host of reasons, including regional and international security concerns, Libya cannot ignore sub-Saharan Africa. It shares concerns with its regional neighbors over the proliferation of weapons, trafficking of people across the Sahara, and use of smuggling routes for illicit commodities such as drugs. Libya will also need cooperation on issues such as the presence of exiled members of the former regime in African countries and Libya's commercial investments across Africa. However, given the new Libyan leadership's deep distrust, we should not expect to see a rapid improvement in the relationship.

Stories from the fall

The African Union Mediation Effort

United Nations Security Council resolution 1973 of March 17, 2011, in paragraph 1, demanded an immediate ceasefire, and in paragraph 2, stressed the need to find a solution to the crisis, making specific mention of the AU's effort at "facilitating dialogue to lead to the political reforms necessary to find a peaceful and sustainable solution." Nonetheless, by the time this resolution was passed, the P3 (France, Britain and the United States) had already made their decision that military action would continue until regime change had been achieved. The UN was of the opinion that there was no opportunity for negotiations until the killing of civilians had ceased. The AU's position was that there was always time for negotiation, and that

an attempted military solution would have high costs for Libya and unknowable repercussions for the region.

The AU initiative suffered from many flaws, including internal divisions within the continent, poor public relations, and the failure to counteract negative perceptions of the African intention and role among Libyans and internationally. The Libyan opposition was deeply skeptical of the AU's endeavor. Nonetheless the AU roadmap and framework were the only full package on offer for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and it failed primarily due to opposition from the P3. From an early date, members of the AU's ad hoc High Level Committee were clear in private that Gaddafi needed to step down, and managed to wring a tacit concession from him on this. South African President Jacob Zuma, who chaired the committee, put considerable effort into the initiative and coordinated with the Russians. However, by the time that talks reached the stage at which Gaddafi was actively contemplating leaving power, the NTC was gearing up for its final offensive on Tripoli.

Neighbors' Involvements

The role of **Sudan** was critical in the overthrow of Gaddafi. Sudanese support to the Libyan opposition was immediate and generous, based on Sudan's interest in ending Gaddafi's patterns of interference in its internal affairs, by, for instance, supporting rebel groups like the Justice and Equality Movement in Darfur. Sudanese support stretched far beyond engaging in supporting the anti-Gaddafi elements in the local politics of south-east Libya. The NTC leadership sought out Sudanese support and were provided with weaponry, logistics and expertise that were enormously helpful in the war effort, up to the western mountains, Misrata and Tripoli itself. The extent of this support has never been fully documented but it is openly acknowledged by both the NTC and Sudan, though not yet by NATO. It is not clear whether there was actual battlefield coordination between Sudanese intelligence officers and NATO in terms of target selection by aircraft. Sudan's role has continued beyond the conflict in terms of monitoring the southern borders of Libya, tracking Gaddafi loyalists, and helping with contacts between the NTC and some sub-Saharan countries (e.g. Niger).

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Chad leaned towards supporting Gaddafi during 2011. Chadian policies towards Libya must be seen in the light of the history of wars between the two countries, including the territorial dispute over the Aouzou strip, the Libyan annexation of Chad, and Libyan sponsorship of particular leaders in the Chadian civil wars. The north-south conflict in Chad is itself in large part a product of Libya intervention.

Chadian President Idriss Déby feared the NTC, which he saw as rigidly Islamist and ready to expel Africans from Libya. He was also aware of the potential for Libya to destabilize its neighbor. After the conflict, Déby is looking to normalize relations with the NTC, but he also has a strong commitment to the Toubou who

live both in northern Chad and southern Libya and will, if necessary, intervene to back them up in their local conflicts inside Libya.

Libyans see Chad as their backyard. Cyrenaica has historic links to Chad through the Sanussi order. Tripolitania's links to Chad are much weaker.

Current international policies towards southern Libya, northern Chad and the neighboring areas of the Sahara, tend to be framed by the international political boundaries, which are arbitrary. While counter-terrorism policy is integrated across the region, political engagement is not.

Algeria is a powerful influence throughout the Maghreb and the Sahara. Algerian politics present an enigma: it gives the appearance of continual crisis but the regime displays a remarkable resilience. It is an oligarchic state in which each faction of the elite also has a reach into the opposition, creating a structure that is remarkably resistant to systemic change, despite day-to-day signs of crisis such as numerous local riots. The regime also has a memory of the 1988 October demonstrations that led to the Algeria's failed democratization and subsequent civil war, and is determined not to repeat the same mistakes. The government has learned to manage expressions of popular discontent, using the pattern of numerous local demonstrations to identify the most pressing issues needing its attention, without being threatened.

Algeria took a strong non-interventionist position in the 2011 conflict and Libyans see it as representing the old order. The Algerian security services enjoy a reputation for penetrating all armed groups and political formations both inside and across their borders, making them a formidable presence in the region.

The role of **Qatar** in Libya and more widely in the Middle East and Africa has not been subject to much critical scrutiny by scholars, perhaps because of Qatar's role as a prominent sponsor of higher education, research and mediation. However, the rapid emergence of this small but rich state as an important player in the wider region deserves attention. Initially Qatar carved out the niche of mediator, serving as friend to all, but during 2011 played a more assertive role in intervening in Libya. Qatar's extensive engagements throughout the region can be characterized as "promiscuous," pursued to further its interests of competing with Saudi Arabia, countering Iran, gaining favor in the West, and protecting its own security. Within the Arab countries, Qatar has filled a vacuum of state mediator, but in its efforts to expand into Africa, it has moved into a more crowded field and run up against the AU. There are important unanswered questions about the professionalism, effectiveness and sustainability of Qatar's foreign policy roles.

The Conflict in Mali

The seminar paid special attention to the conflict in Mali. While this crisis was triggered by the Libyan conflict, specifically the return of several thousand Malian Tuareg who had served in the Libyan armed forces, the roots of the crisis are internal to Mali. In fact, the problem should be seen not as a crisis in the

north, but as one intrinsic to the Malian state itself, which has since independence failed to come to a workable political arrangement with the Tuareg and other populations of the northern regions, as well as failing to address the needs of citizens in the south.

The current situation, with several insurgent groups (separatist and Islamist) operating in northern Mali, and a decrepit political system and army in the southern part of the country, is unsustainable. The objective of the government and the international community should not be to restore Malian state pride and territorial integrity, but to reform and restructure the Malian state. The military option, currently being pursued, suggests three main scenarios, none of them promising. Under scenario one, the Government of Mali and ECOWAS launch an offensive to recapture the north, and "win." This would provoke a humanitarian crisis and would further embitter the Tuareg and radicalize the inhabitants of the north. Under scenario two, the rebels win, with a similar outcome. The third scenario is a stalemate.

A national political settlement is needed. The best options are those based on the 1992 National Charter, including maximum devolution of powers to the northern regions and a national process of reconciliation. However the necessary internal political forces to push for such a solution are not currently present and international discussions are largely focused on military intervention.

The internal dynamics within the north also require attention. The Tuareg, themselves a diverse group, are only one ethnic group among several in the north, matched in numbers by Arabs and Songhai. Conventional distinctions between Sufis and Salafis in the north do not hold: the dynamics of Islamism are changing. The different insurgent groups have divergent agendas and may find it difficult to maintain a coalition.

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Several commentators pointed out that beginning under U.S. President George W. Bush, that the U.S. provided significant support to the Malian army, which, nonetheless, crumbled at the first sign of insurgency. Its next move was to stage a coup. Before they can be expected to play an effective, let alone positive, role in resolving Mali's armed insurgencies, the Malian military and security sector needs reform.

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Conclusions

The following principal conclusions can be derived from the seminar.

- The full account of the 2011 uprising, conflict and revolution remains to be written. There are important details of the AU mediation effort, and the roles of neighboring countries that have yet to see the light of day.
- Libya and its sub-Saharan neighbors need to engage with one another, and the AU and Libya need to develop common understanding.
- The central Sahara, consisting of southern Libya and the adjoining areas of the neighboring countries, should be studied as an integrated whole, in pursuit of integrated national and international policies.

Note: Additional information about this seminar, including short essays by several participants, can be found on the World Peace Foundation blog, Reinventing Peace, http://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/ .

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November 2012