

Post-Gaddafi Libya: The Cost of Western Adventurism in Africa

Today marks 9 years since the murder of Col. Muammar Gaddafi by a combined effort of NATO and American forces. If there was ever a perfect example of the terribly high cost of Western adventurism in Africa, Libya is it. A once prosperous, ambitious country now lies in ruins.

On October 20, 2011, U.S Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was just starting off an interview with American cable news titan CBS when she was informed by her interviewer that Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had just been killed 'by rebels.' Her reaction? "We came, We Saw, He died", [she said](#) amid a joyful fit of gleeful laughter that could've been mistaken as coming straight from a Wizard of Oz character. I do not wish to join the bandwagon of her American right-wing conspiratorial haters by calling her a witch, but what kind of depravity would make any reasonable person, let alone America's topmost diplomat, react so cavalierly and macabrely to an incident so serious and so ghastly consequential in its implications on an entire people?

Did she even know that, in a bizarre twist of events, her actions in Libya would also come back to haunt her and contribute to her losing of the 2016 presidential race after the murder of an American Ambassador in Benghazi became a rallying cry of her Republican opponents as the epitome of her failed foreign policy, propel a fringe lunatic into the White House who would undo not just her 'legacy' but that of her boss, President Obama?

"I hate to say it but our life was better under the previous regime," a crestfallen 42-year-old Libyan pharmacist recently

[told](#) the French Newswire AFP in Tripoli. Today, “we wait for hours outside banks to beg cashiers to give us some of our own money. Everything is three times more expensive,” he further lamented.

By the time the Arab Spring reached Gaddafi’s doorsteps in late 2011, it had felled a couple of North African dictators such as in Tunisia and Egypt. There were questions as to whether Gaddafi’s shrewd iron hand would save or damn him. Libya’s uprising was nowhere near success as those in the rest of the Maghreb. A ragtag group of rebels that were fighting him didn’t have so much of the popular mass support as Egypt or Tunisia and stood no chance against his mighty army. The issues of discontent in Libya were different too: more political than economic. Libya was one of the most prosperous countries in the Arab world. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt where sky-high inflation, graduate unemployment and despair among its youth population were the driving factors in the protests, Libya’s small population, vast mineral wealth and natural gas which Gaddafi had cleverly used to build a modern state, made most of the citizens rather apolitical in their relatively comfortable economic state. Gaddafi, as part of concessions to the protestors, even launched a programme in 2011 to privatize all Libyan oil business to every citizen of Libya. This would initially provide \$21,000 to every citizen from a total of \$32 billion in 2011 and effectively lead to the dissolution of the ministries of health, education and others to eliminate corruption, theft of oil by foreign companies and to decentralise power.

But western powers, in the true ‘Never let a crisis go to waste’ moment, smelt an opportunity to strike at this giant of a man who had been a thorn in their sides for decades by forcing them to pay Libya the market price for its oil. What is more, Gaddafi had created a vast oil endowment fund worth billions for his people, was fast-tracking his ambitions of a ‘united states of Africa’ integration project, and cultivating

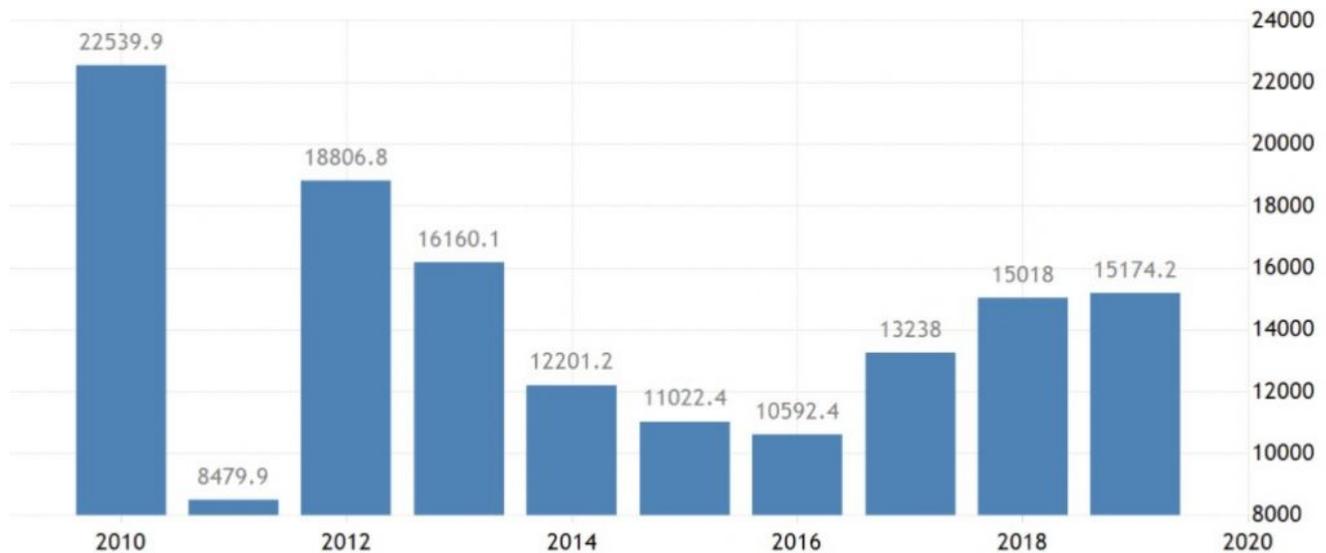
client states across the continent. They let nuance and context out the window, a decision they would later regret.

When a multi-state NATO-led bombing campaign began on 19 March 2011, Libya's rebels were in disarray and stood no chance against Gaddafi. The Western powers, therefore, simply secured the victory and handed it to the rebels, never a good idea in a so-called war of liberation. When victory is handed to you on a silver platter, it's always [a recipe](#) for disaster.

The Gaddafi's Libya they won't tell you about

Before Sarkozy-Obama-Cameron foray into Libya in 2011, the country was among the most advanced in the region economically. Libya's infrastructure was so developed that the rebels in their machine-gun mounted Nissan Pickups and raced the 1000km journey from Benghazi to Tripoli in a couple of hours. Its healthcare was the best in the region. Gaddafi had turned Libya from a primitive, feudal state under a king into one of the most educated and literate nations in the Maghreb region

The United Nations' Human Development Index for decades rated Libya among the highest performers in developing countries and even rivalled some countries in Western Europe. The last time UNDP's Human Development Report was released with Gaddafi in power, [Libya was ranked 53 of 163 countries with comparable data](#). The average HDI of Arab states overall was 0.641 while Libya's was 0.760. Libya was, therefore, better off than most Arab States. Libya's [GDP per capita](#) was over \$22,000 right before the deadly NATO chicanery in 2010. It plummeted to \$8,000 after the war.



SOURCE: TRADINGECONOMICS.COM | CENTRAL BANK OF LYBIA

Libya under Gaddafi, therefore, was not the shithole the western powers convinced the world it was in engineering that infamous UN resolution 1973 that effectively sealed the country's fate. The high standard of living Ghaddafi afforded the Libyan people cannot be denied irrespective of the efforts of western scholars to do so. Before most African governments thought that 'free stuff' was cool, education and healthcare were already free for all in Gaddafi's Libya. Here are a few more examples of Libya's Exceptionalism during Gaddafi:

- Newlyweds [received U.S \\$50,000](#) from the government. Gaddafi's government had legislation providing for a grant to newlyweds to buy their first apartment to help them start a family.
- Gaddafi built the world's largest irrigation scheme to make sure that his semi-desert country had enough water supply throughout the year for agriculture and home consumption purposes.
- Libya [had no external debt](#) and had foreign reserves to the tune of \$150 billion most of which were frozen globally. This was money for the Libyan people. As we all know, debt is how western powers keep poor countries enslaved so they can exploit them with abandon. Gaddafi said to hell with this. He didn't need their money. It's why they hated him so much.

- The price of petrol per litre averaged about \$0.14, the lowest anywhere you can find, compared to other oil-rich countries like Nigeria which started exporting crude in 1957! Gaddafi used his country's mineral wealth for the benefit of his people.
- Having a home was considered a human right. [Gaddafi's Green Book](#) which was derided by western scholars of 'democracy' (wonder what they make of Trump's 'Art of The Deal') categorically stated, "house is a basic need of both the individual and the family, therefore it should not be owned by others." The Green Book was Gaddafi's bible of political philosophy and was first published in 1975. He vowed that he would not secure a house for his own parents until every citizen had one.
- For the neoliberal West that invaded and killed him, they ought to have been happy that Gaddafi was a big promoter of women's rights. Women in Libya [were free to work and dress as they liked](#). Ghaddafi didn't believe that it was the role of the state to legislate women's bodies. Perhaps the fact that he had an all-female presidential guard unit attest to this.

Gaddafi's Ills

No one disputes that, despite his economic achievements, Muammar Qadhafi was also a brutal dictator. He didn't pretend that his own brand of dictatorship was a democratic way of running the government. From the time he seized power as a cocky, pretentious and arrogant 27-year-old colonel in 1969, he would go on to rule Libya with a typical Arab iron hand for 42 years. He allowed no elections or dissent. He tortured and killed some of his political opponents. Something a thousand other West-friendly regimes do and go scot-free.

As an example of these double standards, the Arab Spring didn't stop in Libya. It went to Bahrain where that kingdom was threatened. The protestors were shot to death by the

regime in broad daylight. As these poor protesters were being murdered, American F16s were repeatedly taking off and landing but not to drop bombs; it was a normal routine at one of the sleek American airbases in the country. Western media was all but mute on the Bahrain Arab Spring. And the ones in UAE, Morocco, Saudi Arabia. Libya had to pay a price simply for not being an 'ally' of western powers.

Gaddafi's cardinal sin was to use his country's vast oil wealth for the development of his country and not to allow Europeans and Americans free reign.

Gaddafi's iron hand helped to keep the multiple tribal fissures of the country in check. He was able to deal with two central dilemmas characteristic of Libyan society: the difficulty of exercising control over the tribes, on the one hand; and the fragmentation of society into diverse and sometimes opposite tribal and regional groups, on the other hand. Gaddafi had the ability to hold together these territories with little connection to each other. It is estimated that there are about 140 tribes in the Libyan territory, each with different traditions and origins.

When he was killed, the country, essentially, died with him. Currently, there are multiple spheres of influence around the country. The feckless and weak Tripoli-based UN-backed government, the Tobruk (Eastern Libya-based) government aligned with warlord Khalifa Haftar, and multiple, sometimes street by street enclaves of power governed by criminals and terrorists (ISIS and Al Qaeda have some presence too)

Libya is now a hotbed for ISIS-type terrorism, the wild west where [slave markets are open](#) with abandon, and is a favorite route for thousands of desperate Africans on their way to draw into the Mediterranean in their ill-fated attempt to reach Europe. Multiple Middle Eastern countries, Turkey, Egypt and UAE, are now fighting for influence in the country,

supporting multiple opposing warlords, and so are Americans, Europeans and Russians. Thousands of Libyans have been killed in the process. In the whole melee, Africa, especially the African Union (which for years Gaddafi kept afloat with funding) is absent! (Even the conferences for Libya's post-Gaddafi reconstruction are being held in western capitals, [with no African Representatives](#), which has enraged some African leaders.

Not that they were not warned. Gaddafi himself, Before he was overthrown and killed, warned that jihadists would take advantage of the power vacuum in Libya to conquer northern and Western Africa inflicting widespread violence and terror. "...Al-Qaeda considers all the people to be infidels," Mr. Gaddafi declared in a speech weeks before NATO began its intervention . "They deem all people their enemies. They know nothing but killing." The Islamists would pour in from Afghanistan, Algeria, and Egypt, he warned, saying, "These are beasts with turbans." Those who know what's happening in The Sahel, in Mali, Niger (where dozens of French and American troops were recently killed in terror clashes), Northern Nigeria, etc can attest to this. These conflicts are in part fuelled by unlimited arms left in the wake of Gaddafi over throw.

The African Union begged NATO not to intervene, to give chance for peace talks between Gaddafi and his rebel adversaries, a prospect that was not impossible. Gaddafi had even agreed to leave for exile. Uganda's Museveni, in an 18-page Impassioned plea carried in the country's state owned newspaper as well well as in the Foreign Policy magazine, warned western powers not to invade Libya and let the AU try to solve the problem. But when the AU delegation was airborne headed to Libya, The UN imposed a no fly zone and almost immediately NATO bombs began to rain on the country.



Ghaddafi at the height of his power. Photo: Internet
Obama Regrets

In one of those mainstream American media messianic interviews with President Obama titled the 'Obama's Doctrine' (right, next to The Truman Doctrine or The Powell doctrine, you understand) the president [told the Atlantic's Geoffrey Goldberg](#) that intervening in Libya was the 'Worst Mistake' of his presidency. "failing to plan for the day after...", he added. In that interview, he also criticised France and the UK, in particular saying British Prime Minister David Cameron became "distracted" after the intervention.

'Mistake?!' Cheating on one's spouse is a mistake. Throwing a tantrum over a trivial matter is a mistake. But a conscious decision that led to the death of 100,000 human beings is a 'mistake' too? This is not surprising coming from a man who apparently [kept a secret 'kill list'](#) for his drone war in the Middle East in which thousands of innocent civilians were killed. So, as we can see, it wasn't only Hillary Clinton that so cavalierly speaks about African lives. And these are 'Liberals', the folks we are told are worldly and smart and

are supposedly more compassionate of fellow citizens of the world.

One can only hope that the deadly Libyan mess is a lesson for their successors. Africa needs to band together to [resist](#) this deadly neocolonial cancer that still preys on our wealth, lives and lands.