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Diplomacy's Day in Northern Africa?

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The character of politics in the northern third of Africa may be undergoing a sea change. Generational transitions in political leadership have occurred in Tunisia and Niger, creating fresh opportunities for realignment of regional forces. Egypt seems to be emerging from its diplomatic isolation in the Arab world as a result of the November summit in Amman, Jordan. And even more dramatic shifts are occurring in the geographic triangle comprising Libya, Chad, and Algeria, where Algeria's President Chadli Benjedid and the Organization of African Unity's new chairman, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, are engaged in complementary initiatives aimed at modifying the erratic behavior of Libya's Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi through adroit diplomacy. Another key player could be Tunisia's new president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who concluded his first official announcement as head of state with a pledge to "achieve the unity of the Maghreb on the basis of common interests."

The Two Major Initiatives

Two major initiatives have emerged in recent months to weave Libya back into harmony with the region's political fabric: a proposal by Algeria to admit Libya to membership in the "Treaty of Fraternity and Concord" forged in 1983 between Tunisia, Mauritania, and Algeria, thereby enticing Tripoli to accept some constraints on its behavior in exchange for the political respect the Qaddafi government craves; and an OAU initiative to resolve by diplomacy and/or mediation the remaining bone of contention between Libya and Chad — the Aouzou Strip issue. (See "Basis of Libya's Claim to the Aouzou Strip," page 3.)

(1) **The Algerian Initiative.** Algeria's basic operational premise is that Qaddafi's pan-Arab ambitions can be finessed by association in a bona fide regional grouping. Benjedid's willingness to risk a loose treaty relationship with Libya can best be understood in the context of his country's broader foreign policy objectives.

Algeria has consistently regarded Libya as a suitor willing to pay a certain bride price for tying a knot — even on Algerian terms — provided some symbolic concessions were made to Qaddafi's pan-Arab, pro-revolutionary leanings. A *Pax Algeriana* in the form of an enlarged "Treaty of Fraternity and Concord" would offer Libya an escape from isolation. Such an association also would enable Algeria to lock its wayward, unorthodox neighbor in a loose embrace as an alternative to casting that country out of polite North African society and so allowing



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it free rein to indulge the appetites and aspirations of its erratic leader.

On a personal level, President Benjedid has never shunned Colonel Qaddafi; he maintained dialogue with him even during the 1984-1986 period when Libya and Morocco (Algeria's traditional rival) were linked in a quasi-union. In January 1986, Benjedid and Qaddafi met in Algeria; this was followed by a visit to Tripoli in March 1986 by Algerian Prime Minister Abdelhamid Brahimi. While the purpose of the latter meeting was ostensibly to develop "economic cooperation," "union" was mentioned for the first time as having been a subject of discussion.

President Benjedid reciprocated Qaddafi's visit in December 1986. In June 1987, Libya's second-in-command, Staff Major Abd al-Salam Ahmad Jallud, paid a five-day visit to Algiers, which was capped by a June 18 joint communiqué stating that the two parties had "studied a political document concerning a union between Libya and Algeria, which will be submitted to the leaderships of the two countries." In late June 1987, Qaddafi again visited Algeria and twice stated that "union" would be proclaimed November 1, Algeria's national day.

At the same time Algerian officials were keeping the door open to all Libyan overtures, indicating a desire for closer relations, they were also privately assuring inquirers that there was no intention of entering into a "union" if it meant "fusion." Meanwhile, Algeria continued to nudge along the disintegration of the 1984 Libyan-Moroccan Treaty of Oujda.

For all three leaders — Qaddafi, Benjedid, and now Ben Ali — a principal imperative for the future is to overcome a range of social and economic difficulties confronting their respective countries. Chief among these are high population growth rates; a diminished capacity to compete in the international marketplace for export earnings; burgeoning debt burdens; agricultural output that fails to meet domestic consumption needs, thus necessitating importation of basic goods; and a widening gap between the output of educated young specialists and technicians and the absorptive capacities of the public and private sectors.

These realities could contribute to political rapprochement in the region, as illustrated by Tunisia's recent initiatives toward reestablishment of trade and consular relations with Libya ruptured in 1985 as one of the by-products of a personality conflict between Bourguiba and Qaddafi. At stake are employment opportunities for 15 to 20 thousand Tunisian workers, and substantial remittances for their families. The Algerian leadership too has shown increasing awareness of the importance of domestic and regional peace and security as a precondition for needed economic development. (See "Algeria Today and Tomorrow: An Assessment" by I. William Zartman in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 65, November 28, 1986.) While Morocco confronts equally pressing economic realities and development needs, its priority of defending the sand wall in the Western

Sahara seems immutable, as does the risk of isolation within its natural Maghrebian fraternity.

(2) **The OAU Initiative.** Prospects for a diplomatic solution of the differences between Libya and Chad are more promising today than at any time in the past two decades. Not since the middle 1960s has Chad been as free of fighting among political factions, all of which at one time or another turned to Libya for help. Not for half a decade has the country (except for the still-occupied Aouzou Strip) been free of a Libyan military presence. And for the first time since 1982, Qaddafi has no significant Chadian political faction behind which he can mask his political aspirations. (See "Chad's Third Republic: Strengths, Problems, and Prospects" by William J. Foltz in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 77, October 30, 1987.)

A strong case can be made for the view that Chad's pacification, unification, and liberation are as much a product of diplomacy as of the military assistance provided by France and the United States. Indeed, President Hissène Habré has shown unexpected prowess as a statesman since he took power in 1982. Reconciliation more than repression was the instrument that neutralized his internal opposition over the past five years. The promise of power sharing helped overcome the "commando" groups in the south that took up arms against him.

The OAU has compelling reasons to concentrate on taking full advantage of the present opening for a possible Chad settlement. For nearly a decade, Qaddafi's interventions in Chad have repeatedly bedeviled and virtually immobilized the organization. Particularly troublesome was the issue of legitimacy, specifically Habré's claim that his forcible seizure of power as *de facto* president in 1982 had annulled Goukouni Oueddei's *de jure* claim to leadership based on the OAU-sponsored 1979 agreement establishing a *Gouvernement d'Union Nationale de Transition* (GUNT) with Goukouni at its head. These conflicting claims were a source of divisiveness at successive OAU

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Basis of Libya's Claim to the Aouzou Strip

In the first six months of 1973, Libyan troops and military vehicles entered Chadian territory and set up a small garrison in the oasis of Aouzou. The Libyan military occupation of this area (which must be differentiated from Qaddafi's various involvements in Chad's internal power struggles) is based on a claim that Aouzou, and a 100-mile-wide strip of territory along the entire Chad-Libya frontier known as the Aouzou Strip, is rightfully Libya's by virtue of it having been ceded by France to Italy in the Mussolini-Laval agreements of January 7, 1935.

The Libyan argument ignores the fact that the 1935 agreement, which was designed to woo Italy away from an alliance with Hitler's Germany, was never ratified. Moreover, Chad's colonial boundaries inherited at independence in 1960, which the OAU member states implicitly pledged to honor in the reference to "respect for the... territorial integrity of each member state" in Article III of the organization's 1963 charter, included the Aouzou Strip.

To be sure, the Aouzou area was a subject of dispute long before 1935. France negotiated the issue successively with the Ottoman Empire and Italy. After World War II, French forces occupied large parts of southern Libya for a time. Broad analogies are sometimes drawn between Libyan popular attitudes about the Aouzou Strip and Moroccan public opinion on that country's claim to the Western (formerly Spanish) Sahara.

Because of preoccupation with subduing antigovernment FROLINAT rebels then holding the Aouzou area, President François Tombalbaye's government (1960-1975) evidently never protested when news of the 1973 Libyan occupation of Aouzou

began to filter through to the Chadian capital, N'Djamena. While on an official visit to Tripoli in December 1972, Tombalbaye signed a treaty with Libya aimed at improving "cooperation in the economic, financial, social... and other domains," and ending Libyan support for FROLINAT. This has prompted considerable speculation over the years that the Aouzou occupation was secretly approved by Tombalbaye in the context of an article in the December treaty providing for cooperation in an undefined "solidarity zone" between the two countries. Documents to this effect, it is alleged, exist in the archives of the Ministry of Planning in N'Djamena. It was not until 1977 that Tombalbaye's successor, Félix Malloum, took the case of the Aouzou occupation to the UN Security Council, where it was buried in a compromise.



summits from 1982 through 1986.

When Goukouni's troops defected to the Habré regime in late 1986, the issue of legitimacy was for all practical purposes resolved. The wounding of Goukouni in Tripoli in late 1986 (during what may have been an attempt by Libyan troops to arrest him) removed any lingering doubts about Libyan intentions and actions. A consensus on Chad rapidly emerged at the 1987 OAU summit in Addis Ababa that the mandate of the OAU ad hoc committee on Chad should be renewed and that priority should be accorded to devising a strategy for resolving the issue that is the focus of the Chadian-Libyan dispute, the status of the Aouzou Strip.

This mandate was given new impetus with the election of Zambia's President Kaunda as 1987-1988 OAU chairman. Long a proponent of reason and persuasion in the resolution of differences, Kaunda promptly traveled to Algeria, Chad, Libya, and Gabon (whose president, Omar Bongo, is chairman of the ad hoc committee) to press for action on a

cease-fire and an agreement on judicial procedures for resolving the Aouzou issue.

The outlook for the OAU's new Chad initiative thus far seems uncharacteristically hopeful. The September 11, 1987 cease-fire between Chad and Libya appears to be holding despite charges and countercharges of bad faith and violence from both sides. These include specific Chadian accusations of Libyan overflights of northern Chad and threatening Libyan army movements just across Chad's border with western Sudan. The proposal that both parties submit documentation in support of their claim to the Aouzou Strip to a panel of OAU legal experts has apparently been accepted. The evidence is scheduled to be examined at a special meeting in Libreville, Gabon, in December 1987. The results in the form of a final ruling are to be considered at a special OAU summit in Dakar, Senegal, scheduled for January 1988 — a summit that both Habré and Qaddafi have reportedly pledged to attend.

It is noteworthy that the governments of both Chad and Libya have reserved the right to appeal any OAU judgment to the International Court of Justice. This "escape hatch" arrangement has the virtue of giving the loser a means of postponing and appealing the final verdict — a desirable safety valve where inflated egos and high psychological stakes are involved. To leave Qaddafi in particular with no alternative but further humiliation would risk triggering a resumption of unbridled violence. And, given the OAU's lack of the military means or the organizational structure to intervene in military conflicts, a new flare-up of the Chad fighting must be avoided if the OAU is to shape events in the region. At stake is not just the fate of the Aouzou Strip but an opportunity for the Organization of African Unity to rehabilitate itself as a force for resolving future disputes among its members.

Prospects

Ironically, one of the obstacles to the OAU and Algerian diplomatic initiatives could be the United States. Although U.S. policy is not opposed to the OAU objectives in the broad sense, Reagan administration strategy has been to "isolate" Qaddafi, whereas Algeria's objective is to integrate and envelop Libya in a restraining framework. The differences arise in large measure from contrasting underlying assumptions in Washington and Algiers.

The Reagan administration acts on the principle that Qaddafi is evil personified and must go, that no successor could possibly be as objectionable, and that isolation is the logical means of bringing Qaddafi's rule to an early end. The operational assumption is that (1) on balance, the effect of isolation is to weaken a regime, and (2) when normal relations are withheld, internal opposition movements take heart and are encouraged, particularly when internal opposition might benefit from ostracism of the leader.

The Algerian reasoning is that ostracism exacerbates tensions and, in the case of an unstable personality like Qaddafi, can trigger costly military adventures that can give rise to threats to the aggressor nation's security. Such threats in turn can inspire national solidarity, thus prolonging rather than shortening such a leader's hold on power. This line of reasoning is shared by many Africans and Europeans.

As the country bearing the brunt of the heavy costs of the military confrontation with Libya in Chad, France openly encourages Algerian and OAU initiatives to contain Libyan aspirations. Indeed, even some of the most conservative French observers (see "The Enduring French Connection" by J. Coleman Kitchen, Jr. in *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 68, January 26, 1987) suggest that the U.S. resort to bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986 had the counterproductive effect of strengthening Qaddafi's rule by bringing him, as the target of a superpower, expressions of sympathy from a range of

unlikely quarters, and that the net result within Libya was to enhance Qaddafi's stature and discourage efforts to replace him.

As for African opinion, the following excerpt from an April 1986 lead editorial in the venerable London-based (but Nigerian-owned) weekly *West Africa* is representative of much that one read and heard in 1986-1987 about the Tripoli-Benghazi raids:

The latest adventure in Libya makes comparison between President Reagan and Colonel Gaddafi inescapable. [The Reagan administration] accuses Gaddafi of sponsoring terrorists, by which [it] apparently means that the Libyan leader gives support to terrorists in the form of providing sanctuary, training, equipment and facilities. [The United States] sponsors persons [it] chooses to call freedom fighters, but who to most other people are terrorists. Those [the administration] feels no contradiction in sponsoring include the Contras in Nicaragua; the South African quisling in Angola, Jonas Savimbi [President Reagan] had no difficulty in defending the Israeli bombing of Tunis and the hijack of a Libyan civilian plane.... In Grenada, Nicaragua, Angola, and now Libya, the U.S. administration in its easy disregard for international law when not convenient, seems determined to re-establish the principle of "might is right" in international relations, that philosophy of bygone days that launched gun-boats to impose solutions. Those who may wish to rejoice at Gaddafi's discomfiture must ask themselves: Who next?

Algeria's strategy of containing Qaddafi by means of a pan-Arab embrace, on the other hand, has been widely welcomed as a gamble worth taking. OAU credibility and continuity as an institution of consequence in Africa are on the line. For Algeria, the quest for a *Pax Algeriana* represents a major test of its potential as the political and economic center of North Africa. But when a neighbor as driven by mystical aspirations as Libya's Qaddafi is the critical element, even the guiding principle of peace and reason will require persistent and constant attention.

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