

# A different view of Libya's Qaddafi

By Lois A. Aroian 18 Jan 1982

Much has been made in the United States of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's seemingly interventionist policies. The press has tended to view the Libyan leader as a caricature at best and a wild man at worst. As a result, most Americans have no sound and objective basis on which to evaluate either Qaddafi or Libyan actions. Furthermore, they tend to disregard or ignore the perspective of the objects of Libyan attention.

From the outset of the Libyan revolution in 1969, Libya's approach to Africa has been both purposeful and wide-ranging. Under Qaddafi's leadership, the number of Libyan embassies in Africa has risen from 8 to 30.

Libya today contributes generously to the Arab-organized development bank for Africa, BADEA, and to other multilateral organizations like the OPEC Special Fund, the Arab Fund for Technical Assistance to Africa, and the Islamic Development bank.

Libya also operates a bilateral economic aid program. Among the countries in which Libya has set up joint companies are Ghana, Togo, Gabon, Mali, Somalia, Guinea, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Burundi, Congo, and Benin. These countries vary ideologically and religiously, both from each other and from Libya, thereby illustrating the essential pragmatism of the Libyan effort in sub-Saharan and Saharan Africa. Other Libyan agreements for aid have taken the form of concessional loans.

There is no denying, of course, that in both Muslim and non-Muslim Africa, the Muslim component constitutes a key element in Libyan relations. Not only has Libya supported Muslim schools and radio broadcasts, but it has also sponsored trips and conferences in Tripoli and Benghazi for sub-Saharan Africans.

Libya's efforts in non-Muslim Africa have also led to a personal campaign on the part of Qaddafi to convert African leaders to Islam. Between 1972 and 1980, Qaddafi tried to persuade the presidents of Chad, Togo, Zaire, Gabon, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda to adopt Islam.

The Qaddafi regime has also been accused of supporting opposition groups in Ghana, the Gambia, Senegal, Somalia, Liberia, and in Upper Volta where the coup of December 1980 succeeded.

Despite all of the ink spilled over the "Libyan occupation" of Chad, Africans don't see it that way at all. The Chad civil war has gone on for over 15 years, long before Qaddafi's arrival on the scene, with at least 11 factions struggling for power. Although it began as an effort by the predominantly Muslim nomadic northerners to receive their fair share in the southern Christian and indigenous religious-dominated regimes, the struggle grew more complex after the 1975 overthrow of President Tombalbaye.

Eventually, the Lagos agreement of August 1979 approved the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT), with all factions represented. An Organization of African Unity force was supposed to replace French troops to help keep the peace. Libya's Qaddafi personally supported the new unity.

In April 1980, though, the Chad minister of defense left GUNT and revived the civil war. When GUNT proved unable to defeat the rebels, President Goukhouni Woddei requested Libyan aid. Within a month of the appeal of November 1980, Libya responded by sending forces into Chad.

Most Africans viewed Libya's willingness to send troops as a positive development. Libyan troops were able to quell the fighting temporarily and to restore some semblance of order. The fact that the fighting resumed cannot be blamed on Libya.

Conditions worsened because international lending agencies like the International Monetary Fund refused to grant loans to help relieve human suffering. Refugees seeking sustenance poured into Nigeria, Sudan, and the Cameroon. In October 1981, President Shagari of Nigeria revived the idea of an OAU force. He realized that it was the OAU inaction earlier which had led to the appeal to Libya. Despite the proclamation of Libyan-Chadian unity in February 1981, African states expected Libya to withdraw as soon as an alternative could be found.

Finally, France and the OAU accepted responsibility for shoring up GUNT, thereby permitting the Libyans to make a respectable exit at President Woddei's request. During their year in Chad, the Libyans took heavy casualties while the drop in oil prices reduced the flexibility of Libya's budget.

What we can learn from this episode about Qaddafi's involvement in Africa is that the Libyan leader has consistently displayed a concern for African affairs. He has won the respect of most African leaders. Even those who have been irritated by repeated conversion attempts view him as a purposeful, firm, sincere, dedicated, and gracious leader.

In particular, his support for liberation movements around the world has shown them that, even though Libya is a small country, it is willing to use its financial resources as well as words. What is viewed in the US as support for terrorism is seen by others as a commitment to freedom.

It is doubtful that the OAU can accomplish in Chad the settlement which has thus far eluded the country, but the Libyan involvement gave the country a brief respite from the war which has since revived.

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## Libya's 'interventions'

Lois A. Aroian writes in "A different view of Libya's Qaddafi" [Jan. 18] about "Qaddafi's seemingly interventionist policies" in Africa. She evidently thinks Libya has not been interventionist, merely benevolent. But she omitted to mention several of Qaddafi's actions which directly undermine her argument:

- Qaddafi gave verbal, monetary and military support to some of the continent's most barbaric rulers, including Idi Amin and Jean-Bedel Bokassa.

- Libya trained and dispatched the troops which attacked the Tunisian town of Gafsa in January, 1980.

- Qaddafi aided movements working to overthrow existing governments in some dozen African countries.

- Libya annexed 7,500 square miles of Niger, a similar region of Algeria, and 37,000 square miles of Chad (what is known as the Aozou strip) in 1976. All these areas are thought to contain uranium.

- In Chad, the country Miss Aroian dwells on, Qaddafi has consistently used his money, weapons, and soldiers to manipulate factions in that country's civil war in such a way so as to extend his own influence, intending ultimately to control the country. He tried to annex Chad in 1981, but failed only because he lacked the necessary resources. But there is no reason to assume he has given up.

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