A History of Conflict and International Intervention in Libya

Ryan Timothy Jacobs
Department of International Affairs
University of North Carolina, Wilmington
601 South College Road, Wilmington, NC 28403
rtj2479@uncw.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the conflict in Libya; most notably from the 2011 ousting of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi up to the present issues surrounding the state. Centralizing on the overall political and economic history of the African state, the following will elaborate upon the socio-dynamics within Libyan borders; and provide explanations for present day conditions. Utilizing a comparative analysis of other African states which have been presented with similar issues serves in determining the criteria that international actors can examine to identify management and resolution skills that meet issues in present day Libya.

Keywords: Libya, Intervention, Gaddafi, United Nations, Conflict Management and Resolution, United States, European Union, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, NATO, African Union.

Introduction

The state of Libya has had a long history of struggle. As far back as the 7th century B.C., the inhabitants of the now 679,358 square mile region of Africa have regularly been in intrastate conflicts, under the rule of various empires such as the Roman Empire from 46 B.C. to 436 A.D. and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century A.D., riddled with Barbary pirates raiding merchant ships, had hostilities with large nation-states including Italy, and was home to much of the desert fighting during the World War II. The political infrastructure was also highly influenced by the Italian Imperialism during the First World War; and with Italian interests in African territory, the fascist ideology which spread throughout the region also impacted Libyan governance during this time. This included the establishment of concentration camps to prevent resistance. The overwhelming arrival of foreigners gave rise to a divided society which also continues to cause conflict in the region.

Yet, as fascism crumbled during the war, Libya had an opportunity to rid themselves of Italian oppression. At this time, as natural enemies of Italy due to their imperialistic rule, Libya joined forces with the U.S.A. and Great Britain to drive Italians, as well as Germans out of this particular region of North Africa. It was not until after World War II (in 1951) that the region became the United Kingdom of Libya, and was recognized as an independent sovereign state. In the 1950s, it is also agreed that the future of Libya will be referred to the United Nations.

In addition, it was in the 1950s that the United Kingdom of Libya held their first election and Mohammed Idris became king. For the first eight years as king, Idris did not do much to improve the economic, political or society of Libya. Although, shortly thereafter, oil was discovered, which assisted in the growth of Libya's economy. This discovery assisted Libya in securing the withdrawal of foreign troops, and the need for British and U.S.A. airbases and international aid.
History of Conflict and International Intervention in Libya

In the bloodless coup of 1969, Mohammed Idris was overthrown and Moamar al-Gaddafi became commander in chief of the armed forces, and the chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council. Gaddafi quickly gained a reputation as being both unpredictable and aberrant. His political philosophies, a 1977 unveiling of the once named United Kingdom of Libya to the "People's Socialist Libyan Arab Jamahiriya", caused tension in relationships with neighboring states, the funding of terrorists groups, and assassination squads to silence Libyan enemies during the late 70's and early 80's got the attention of the U.S.A.; and in 1986 President Ronald Reagan demonstrated commitment to international anti-terrorism activity by performing an air strike over Benghazi and Tripoli, Libya.

More specifically, during this time and up to more recent years, Gaddafi used oil revenues to promote his ideology outside Libya, supporting subversive and terrorist activities that included the downing of two airliners - one over Scotland, another in Northern Africa - and a discotheque bombing in Berlin. UN sanctions in 1992 isolated Gaddafi politically and economically following the attacks. Sanctions were also lifted in 2003 following Libyan acceptance of responsibility for the bombings and agreement to claimant compensation. Gaddafi also agreed to end Libya's program to develop weapons of mass destruction, and he made significant strides in normalizing relations with Western nations. Unrest that began in several Middle Eastern and North African countries in late 2010 erupted in Libyan cities in early 2011. Gaddafi's brutal crackdown on protesters spawned a civil war that triggered UN authorization of air and naval intervention by the international community. After months of seesaw fighting between government and opposition forces, the Gaddafi regime was toppled in mid-2011 and replaced by a transitional government. In February of 2011, a revolution began in Libya. After forty two years in power, Colonel Mummar Gaddafi's regime was being threatened to be dismantled in retaliation for what rebel forces, ordinary citizens, and international organizations deemed inhumane acts.

As pressure mounted, although reluctant because of the revolts in neighboring states (Tunisia and Egypt), and the financial and political toll of the prior interventions in Iraq, and Afghanistan; Great Britain and France pressured the U.S. to take action in Libya. In March of 2011, backed with the support of the Arab League, the U.S. decided to push the UN for a resolution that allowed military action in Libya to protect civilians. UN Security Council Resolution 1973 was passed and allowed for the establishment of a no-fly zone, a group of officials to manage political intervention, support of rebel forces in Libya, which were all aimed at putting pressure on the colonel, and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to step down.

Christopher S. Chivvis, a senior political scientist for the RAND Corporation details the intervention as a high-tech, combined, joint mission operating from Europe, the United States, and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. Military operations relied heavily on presision airpower, striking some 6,000 targets, mostly along Libya's Mediterranean coast. All told, the operation would draw on more than 8,000 personnel, 21 warships, and some 250 aircraft flying more than 26,000 sorties.\(^1\) There were 19 countries that were involved in the intervention, providing military assistance and support for the capture and ultimately the death of Gaddafi.

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In 2012, Libya formed a new parliament and elected a new prime minister. At the end of the civil war, militias continued to clash over political differences. The various problems that have arisen post Libyan Civil War (or the Libyan Revolution), including the September 11, 2012 attack on the U.S.A. diplomatic mission in Benghazi escalated into the current 2014 Libyan Conflict.

Causes of Negative Conflict in Libya

Edward Newman argues that one of the most notable reasons behind interstate conflict in states such as Libya is the society's colonial past. For instance, when a government attempts to consolidate power and centralization, it creates inequalities, a weak sense of national identity, and systematic discrimination; thus causes further tensions among the various people inhabiting the state. In fact, the majority of scholars argue that states which histories are entangled in the aforementioned damaging affects that occur on the interstate level, and that which has led to the Libyan Conflict.

It is with such instability within its political infrastructure, that the people of Libya have increasingly become wearier of political parties throughout the past decades. After the fall of Gadafi's regime, the NTC formed a transitional government which, as mandated by the Constitutional Declaration of 2011, had two main tasks: create the conditions for elections and to manage state affairs. It succeeded in the former task, passing an appropriate law and establishing an electoral commission, before holding elections in July 2012. The transitional government failed however, to lay the groundwork for transitional justice and prioritize other areas of the state management, most notably security, which is not mentioned in the declaration. The lack of focus on security is a primary example of how Libya's transition in 2011 has been difficult to manage, and the transitions themselves have been the underlying issue behind why Libya continues to be unstable.

Dr. Richard Bowd and Dr. Annie Barbara Chikwanha contend that the conflicts that have occurred in Africa throughout the twentieth century as three specific causes (although all conflicts are varied and numerous): the new barbarism, underdevelopment as a cause of war; and the political economy of war. Described by the authors as narratives, the concept of new barbarism is a sort of criminal anarchy involving disease, overpopulation, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, and erosion of borders, powerful private armies, drug cartels, and security firms. Bowd notes Robert Kaplan's thesis as the basis of their theory on the roots of African conflicts. Underdevelopment and violence as a source of negative conflict compares to that of Newman's focus on the external cultural of society within the African state. This also includes the criminal anarchy of new barbarism.

Lastly, the political economy of war addresses what is much more central to the brutal conflicts that have arisen in Libya. Political economy of war draws on the elites desire to find new sources of authority, including control of natural resources, arms dealing, manipulation of

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humanitarian aid, etc. Bowd expresses his third theory by noting World Bank theorists Collier and Hoeffler's ‘greed and grievance’ debate. This discussion attempts to ascertain whether personal will of enrichment (greed) or historical, political and socioeconomic injustices (grievances) has more importance in the origin of those contexts of violence in Africa.  

In addition, a review of Ronald Bruce St. John's article entitled Libya: Continuity and Change, Jacques Roumani explains that the biggest impact of the Gaddafi regime was in foreign policy. Driven by his unyielding ideology, Libya became increasingly anti-Western, supporting terrorism and subversive activities worldwide, especially in Africa, and generally projecting a radical destabilizing force on the international scene. However, major failures and international sanctions contained Gaddafis policies, which he had to finally abandon and return to pre-revolutionary pragmatism, eventually also renouncing Libya's secret weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in 2003 and restoring diplomatic relations with the United States and the West. With a lack of strong foreign policy centralized around friendly negotiations with powerful Western states, the issues that arise internationally only increase tensions domestically; crushing a states’ ability to continue to grow in a particular direction.

**International Reaction to the Intervention**

“The role of international organizations is to help rather than interfere, regardless of the form of interference, in Libya.” ~ Foreign Minister Ramadan Lamamra (Madrid Conference for Libya)

As the intervention in Libya was unique; U.S. interventions in the nearly dozen different times in history since the Cold War have been unique. The U.S. has been successful in some interventions more so than others. To what degree can an intervention be deemed "successful" over not reaching a status of achievement? Skepticism to interventions in conflicts will also be a part of intervening in conflicts, as perspectives across the board will fluctuate because of individual and collective political, economical, and cultural differences. The military intervention began with a mandate from the UN, unlike Afghanistan, Kosovo, or Iraq; which caused much controversy regarding the seven month NATO-led mission to oust Colonel Gaddafi, and put an end to his reign in Libya. The intervention in Libya also stirred much controversy in the U.S. In retrospect, much of the criticism can be justified because of the reliance on European involvement, whereas in the pasts conflicts that had U.S. support assumed the U.S. to take the reins.

Other sources, such as former Congresswoman and Green Party candidate of 2008, Cynthia McKinney argue that:

A series of human rights organizations and think tanks worked with NATO in order to create the propaganda which ultimately overthrew Gaddafi's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. When the time came these bodies coordinated with the NATO powers and the mainstream media in the project to isolate, castrate, and subjugate the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. These so-called human rights organizations and the media worked together to propagate the lies about African mercenaries, Libyan military jet attacks on civilians,

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Jacobs

and civilian massacres by Muammar Qaddafi. International news networks would quote these human rights organizations in what would amount to a self-fuelled cycle of information, while the human rights organizations would then continue to make claims on the basis of the media’s reports. This web of lies was presented to the United Nations Office as Geneva and then presented to the United Nations Security Council in New York City as the basis for the war in Libya.\(^8\)

This further indicates that although powerful states and political actors usually determine the outcome of escalating tensions that result in braking international law, with a multiplied number of cultures that have different perspectives on an international issue; criticism and debate stir the pot, which quickly turns into an epidemic of universal perversion. The concept of international intervention, and the various avenues that democratic nations have felt it is their duty have travelled to seek a way to help a sovereign state survive oppression, poverty, civil war, and disease have proven that it is no easy task. Humanity does not have a definitive understanding of the opposite of the conflict, because it has rarely experienced it.

Since the initial steps towards the strategic actions aimed at protecting civilians, and supporting rebel forces, many in Washington were highly skeptical whether the procedures implemented would even work. With the exception of a few (i.e. Henry Kissinger), criticism of the intervention mounted throughout the course of the conflict. Debates included whether the intervention might actually be a "war" led by NATO and the U.S., pointing blame at the Obama administration for being aloof in the overall militaristic intervention, the financial burden that it would create, as well as other aspects of U.S. involvement. It is abundantly clear that most of the controversial issues weigh heavily on the fact that the U.S. did not have much to gain to benefit economically from any form of intervention in Libya. British, and U.S. oil companies had already began to control Libyan oil under Gaddafi, but protecting the investment might have inclined international intervention. Overall, since the U.S. involvement in the Libyan intervention, the international community places more reliance on the U.S. and the U.S. has increased in global political power.

Current Problems in Libya

Although Muammar Gadhafi’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is gone, patterns of dysfunction are alive and well in the new republic, particularly the political system. Plagued by a preference for participatory politics, distrust of political parties and the inability to pursue national interests over regional or even local aims, the country has faithfully replicated the Jamahiriya’s ‘committee culture’. Caucus democracy, flat hierarchies and the absence of strong parties (and therefore party whips) result in endless debates, watered-down decisions and severe inefficiency. Neither the National Transitional Council (NTC), the country’s former governing body, nor the ruling General National Congress (GNC) were able to establish streamlined structures for decision-making; it took the latter four months to form a government and one year, instead of the planned 30 days, to lay the groundwork for the Constitutional Commission, a 60-member body established to draft the constitution.\(^9\) This furthered citizen’s distrust in the government, and

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stagnated society’s ability to perceive voting as purposeful whatsoever. Also, becoming a member of a political party had been illegal and punishable by death since 1973, and organizations have been banned since 1952. Thus, citizens are also skeptical of political parties, and they perceive them as a threat to national unity. Only 27% of citizens were willing to trust parties totally. Most of those interviewed struggled to define parties or their role, but recalled the previous regime’s slogan, ‘whoever joins a political party is a traitor.’

More importantly, the use of security agents for political purposes in the Jamahiriya instilled a culture in which politics and control of the security sector were entwined, and the armed forces and the police were more used to advancing political goals than ensuring the safety of the country or its citizens. Predictably, the same approaches have continued to dominate in present-day Libya: political actors do not seek to improve the professionalism, doctrines or equipment of the police or the military, but rather seek to maximize their control of these forces. Libya has therefore emerged from a 42-year dictatorship and an eight month civil war with a security and political culture unsuitable for the difficult transition to democracy. Overall, social security is one of the fundamental problems in Libya.

Respectively, Resolution 2174 (2014) by the U.N. Security Council reaffirms their dedication to commitment to protecting the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya. The members of the Committee underscored their commitment to consider taking action against individuals or entities that threaten Libya’s peace and stability or undermine its political transition, or those engaged in transferring arms and related material to or from Libya in breach of the arms embargo, pursuant to resolution 2174 (2014), irrespective of their political affiliation. Bernardino Leon, head of the U.N. Support Mission (UNSNIL) also warned of the dangers of creating parallel political institutions and processes, which would only contribute to increase division and polarization. Leon emphasizes the need to refrain from taking any action that would further exacerbate current divisions, and stress[ed] that any solution to the current crisis would have to be negotiated within the framework of the current political legitimacy that emanated from the elections.

In addition, Libya’s downward slide effectively began on the day that Jalil announced its liberation. Virtually every area of society shows signs of severe mismanagement and progressive deterioration, including security, justice and the economy. The militias are the only source if security present in Libya. Libya’s prospects are therefore rather bleak: its current course threatens to create an uncontrolled, unaccountable security sector; a justice system based on vengeance rather than the rule of law; and a rentier economy which attempts to buy peace. In this scenario, Libya will not be an entirely failed state but rather one that is run by warlords and serves as a haven for criminal and terrorist networks.

Alternative Suggestions to Conflict Management and Resolutions in Regards to the Current Libyan Conflict

A model that can create an optimal approach to managing multicultural conflicts; such as the current Libyan Conflict is the Integration-Adaptation Model. Considering the aims, values, and strategies of both the cultural approach to conflict management, which emphasizes the harmonious navigation to difference in conflict, with the multicultural approach, which champions notions of equity, justice, and fairness in disputes.\(^\text{17}\) Focusing on long-term patterns of multicultural conflict dynamics, which are affected by complex factors, and an emotional context; the Integration-Adaptation Model’s goal is to increase the probabilities for a more constructive than destructive multicultural patterns to emerge. Thus, stabilizing social systems within and outside of the sovereign state. By developing the competencies and conditions for integrative adaptively, which allows individuals and groups to strike a balance between honoring their values and identity, on the one hand, and constructively navigating the environment in which they operate, on the other; individuals no longer become too internally focused, nor dictated by the situation.\(^\text{18}\) It might seem more ideal than reasonable, but an objective perspective is essential in mitigating the conflict.

Furthermore, although the African Union (AU) was recently created and has, in many respects, been snubbed by the UN and other international organizations; an UN-AU hybrid with the AU conducting day-to-day affairs and the UN taking overall control could provide Libya, as well as other African states the beginning of a strong African coalition. For example, resolution 1769 which approved a budget of around 1.5 billion U.S. dollars, and 14,000 troops during UNAMID’s deployment in July of 2007, illustrates the capability of the AU backed by the UN. By deploying a joint mediation team with special envoys, the UN-AU hybrid operation in Darfur proved the success of such collaboration; although the AU was not fast enough in its operation.

Still, since the AU’s funds are extremely low, the reliance on other international organization will remain a problem for African peace-building operations. Throughout the past few decades of UN involvement in Africa, tensions have escalated among the UN and the AU. Most of the issues are caused by how each organization conducts its operations, influence and support of members and trading partners, and lack of funds and resources; and there needs to be more cohesion between the two. The AU should be taken more seriously by the UN, and specifically by the P3 and the western allies. The AU has responded remarkably, in the light of its feeble resources, when the UN has dragged its feet—for instance, in Burundi, Darfur and particularly Somalia.

The AU roadmap for Libya was not impossible and could have been interpreted to include the removal of Gaddafi. The AU—given its special relationship with the Libyan strongman—was in an unusual position to negotiate a face-saving departure. Divorce is not an option. The United Nations and the African Union need each other to address Africa’s chronic security crises. Their current adversarial mode and turf battles should be set aside in favour of collaboration. A strong, reliable and recognized AU will ultimately serve the security interests of Africa.\(^\text{17}\) Deutsch, Morton. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2014. 
all UN member states. During various UN-AU operations in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the achievements provide substantial evidence of the necessity to strengthen ties between powerful states and weaker states. Most notably, the sanctions imposed on Libya by the United Nations in 1992 illustrate the negative backlash from such sanctions that cripple a weaker state's economy. Dan Caldwell (2012) critiques the usage of sanctions since the end of the Cold War, and makes a strong argument against the frequent use of sanctions placed on weaker states by powerful states. Caldwell cites an analysis of economic sanctions by Meghan L. O'Sullivan who identified one hundred and twenty two cases in which sanctions were imposed by the United Nations or the United Nations on state or nonstate actors from 1990 through 2001. In addition, another study mentioned by Caldwell was conducted in 1985, and updated in 1990 by Gary Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott, and Karen Ann Elliott. This specific study concluded that in one hundred and fifteen cases, from 1914 to 1990, only thirty-four percent were proven successful. This particular study was also criticized for being too optimistic.

Lastly, revisiting the intrastate conflicts of Africa's past can assist future peace building operations throughout the continent. The similarities among the poor African states' reasoning for negative conflict provides early warning signs that can be utilized by international organizations to resolve conflicts before tensions become too convoluted by a world leader's political agenda, and propaganda. Accurate media coverage, country specialists, and the AU backed by the UN can allow organizations to proceed with a sense of confidence that is lacked, internationally. The delays in deployment case risks that early warning strategies can mitigate.

For example, the infamous APC-case is illustrative: The United States was to lease (with full remuneration from the UN) 50 armored personnel carriers (APCs) to a second Ghanaian battalion earmarked for UNAMIR. The Pentagon received a formal UN request for these APCs on 19 May, which started a lengthy process. Paperwork for the lease had to be completed before the vehicles could be assigned. Several practical issues went back and forth regarding the type of vehicles (wheeled or tracked?), repainting them (white), finding a training partner (the US requested Egypt but the UN declined due to "extraordinary preconditions.") It took a full week to transport the 50 vehicles from a US base in Germany to Entebbe (Uganda), which by the time that they reached Rwanda on the 30th of July, the entire purpose was irrelevant. As with the initial ousting of Colonel Gaddafi, arming rebel forces; and the deployment of soldiers is essential for conflict management and resolution. The indecisiveness of the United States in operations based on personal burdens (i.e. financial costs, international perception, interstate relations, and economic gains), increases the chance of an escalation of a negative conflict; and the decision to intervene emerges, regardless of U.S. reluctance.

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References


