

Gaddafi leaves behind a legacy of rage and dysfunction

Written by New America Media, News Report, Behrouz Saba
Friday, 04 November 2011 14:29

Muammar Gaddafi was of a Bedouin tribe, raised in a tent near the Libyan city of Sirte, where he met his bloody demise. His end came after nine months of NATO bombing which supported a rag tag, unruly and abusive group of rebels who fanned out across Libya to challenge his authority by claiming bombed out territories and capturing cities.

Ruling the country with an iron fist for more than four decades, his cult of personality was ubiquitous as the purported face, voice and soul of Libya. He ran an oil-rich, rentier state that allowed him to spend his billions in revenues to buy loyalty, reward friends and punish foes.

The stream of oil money, first and foremost into his own pocket, did not create an impetus for him to institute effective educational and economic plans to make a genuine difference in the lives of ordinary Libyans. As a number of other despots across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), he saw a prosperous, civil society as a direct threat to his own authority.

His tribal roots also made him wary of progress. Raised among a self-sufficient people, he had a suspicion of retail stores and contempt for economies based on consumer spending.

Humorist Michael Palin of Monty Python fame compared his narcissism to that of Mick Jagger as he commented in his African travelogue, Sahara, "Gaddafi's survival owes much of his ability to reinvent himself. He's been at various times scourge of the West and leader of the Arab world; currently he is the great Pan-African. The change can be charted on the billboards. It is not quite the old communist-style cult of personality, but there is a lot of him about."

The great Pan-African spent billions to solidify his position on a continent-wide basis. Yet he did not have a high regard for black Africans. Inspired by Mao Zedong's "Red Book," Gaddafi authored his own "Green Book," in which he opines, "The black race is at present in a dire and backward social condition... Their backward social traditions are responsible for the absence of restrictions in marriage leading to an unchecked and high birth rate." He goes on to attribute black Africans' "lassitude" to "living in a constantly hot climate."

His brand of racism is rampant among the rebels as lighter skinned North Africans who see the continent's blacks as inferior. Scores of black Africans who came to Libya as workers are currently detained by the rebels under appalling conditions on charges of being pro-Gaddafi mercenaries.

Along with racism, Gaddafi leaves young Libyans as an angry generation with little understanding of a civil society, the rule of law and the responsibilities that come with freedoms of expression and conduct. The rebels killed Gaddafi and his former defense minister Abu-Bakr Yunis Jabr, their summary executions without trials representing a violent pattern that has targeted numerous Libyans high and low since the beginning of the rebellion. Many ordinary Libyans who did not side with the rebels are hunted down in house-to-house searches as they are accused of remaining loyal to the fallen regime.

It is highly unlikely that after months of bloodshed, Libya is going to settle down any time soon into constructive patterns of fiscal and economic growth that would promote better health, education and better living standards for the majority of people. A Transitional Council has

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proved itself not to be in control of the country and is certain to be challenged by any number of rebel power centers the moment it attempts to exert authority.

The probable breakdown of Libya, which may make of the country another failed MENA state similar to Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, does not bode well for the entire "Arab Spring" scenario which has been championed so vociferously by President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and America's European allies. Championing sudden change without presenting clear, workable alternatives may well have the hidden neo-colonial agenda of keeping MENA nations poor, unstable and therefore ripe for exploitation of their abundant natural resources by supranational conglomerates.

This crass approach is not lost upon al Qaeda in West Africa as well as al Shabaab, groups that find sanctuary among the disaffected people of failed states who live in abject misery as their natural wealth is looted before their eyes. Fighting these forces in an endless, asymmetrical war against "terror" bears every promise of creating a power vacuum in MENA, with China and Russia arraying themselves against the United States and the European Union in an attempt to fill the void. This new bipolar configuration holds dangerous possibilities for the first world war of the twenty-first century.

Indeed the legacy of Gaddafi and similar dictators, combined with supranational corporate opportunism, imperils people far beyond their borders of failed, exploited states to put the entire planet at risk.