

## ***Libya and the U.S.: Qadhafi Unrepentant***

Published in the Winter 2006 *Middle East Quarterly*, pp. 11-20.

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Despite Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi's international rehabilitation, the Libyan leader remains resistant to reform and intolerant of dissent. His ultimate goal—preservation of power—remains unchanged. His decision to abandon his weapons of mass destruction program was not a moral epiphany but rather a calculated attempt to launder his image in order to earn him an exemption from the U.S. effort to democratize the Middle East. So far, his strategy is working. The U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, for example, has licensed companies to enter into business with Libya.<sup>1</sup> Washington's policy toward Libya is counterproductive, however. People across the Middle East juxtapose U.S. rhetoric regarding terrorism and dictatorship with the White House embrace of Libya and conclude that the Bush administration is insincere.

### **The Rise of Qadhafi**

Advocates of engagement and reconciliation with Qadhafi's Libya often have little understanding of the nature of the ruler or the state that he has constructed. Qadhafi's history belies his ambitions and should undercut the seriousness with which policymakers accept his word. He first entered the public spotlight when, on September 1, 1969, he and other "Free Unionist Officers" overthrew the constitutional monarchy of King Idris, nullified all constitutional protections, and announced their Revolutionary Command Council to be the highest authority in Libya.

Initially, the new Libyan regime sought to parallel Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalist discourse.<sup>2</sup> In exchange, the Egyptian government helped solidify the shaky Libyan junta. Nasser's regime embraced Qadhafi and instructed him on how to use media and propaganda to strengthen his grip on power. Egyptian advisors exported their bureaucracy to Libya and helped transform the Libyan education sector to sharpen its focus on Arab nationalist and revolutionary principles.<sup>3</sup> Nasser also helped Qadhafi overhaul the Libyan security

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<sup>1</sup> "[Termination of Emergency Declared](#) in Executive Order 12453 with Respect to the Policies and Actions of the Government of Libya and Revocation of Related Executive Orders," U.S. Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Sept. 20, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> John L. Wright, *Libya: A Modern History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Mansour O. el-Kikhia, *Libya's Qaddafi, The Politics of Contradiction*, reprint ed. (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 42.

apparatus.<sup>4</sup> In return for investment capital, money, and an outlet for Egyptian workers, Nasser provided Qadhafi with legitimacy, protection, and advice.

Qadhafi's grip on power was, nevertheless, far from secure. In December 1969, Egyptian intelligence helped disrupt a plot by the Libyan defense and interior ministers to overthrow the Libyan regime. Their ideological impetus appeared to be growing nationalist unease over Qadhafi's tilt toward Egypt and the radicalism of the more junior Revolutionary Command Council members.<sup>5</sup>

Qadhafi survived the coup plot but concluded that his power depended upon tight control. His Revolutionary Command Council issued a "Law for the Protection of the Revolution," making it a criminal offense to proselytize against the state, to arouse class hatred, to spread falsehood, or to participate in strikes and demonstrations.<sup>6</sup> Within weeks, the Revolutionary Command Council assumed total public control over Libya. Qadhafi assumed formal control as both prime minister and defense minister. He curbed any significant delegation of authority beyond family and his closest associates.

In subsequent years, Qadhafi instituted an Islamization and Arabization campaign to cleanse Libyan society of Western influence. He removed Latin street signs, banned the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, closed the U.S. and British bases, and expelled both foreigners and much of the Libyan Jewish communities.<sup>7</sup> He converted Tripoli's cathedral to a mosque and Benghazi's cathedral to a headquarters for the Arab Socialist Union. Prior to their expulsion, Qadhafi forced the Italian community to exhume the remains of their dead to take back to Italy, an event he televised live.

The Cairo-Tripoli détente began to unravel in September 1970 after Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser. Sadat mistrusted Qadhafi. While Sadat agreed to a limited partial union between the two neighbors in 1972, he remained suspicious of Qadhafi's offer for a full union in which Sadat would be president and Qadhafi defense minister.<sup>8</sup> Qadhafi's ambitions worried the Egyptian ruler. Qadhafi was a man who did not hesitate to turn on his allies for the sake of empowerment. He may have thought himself another Shishonk I, a Berber officer from what is today Libya, who led a palace coup to found the twenty-second dynasty of Egypt (945-745 B.C.E.). While the Egyptian embrace had enabled Qadhafi to consolidate his power, the student had begun to emerge from the shadow of his master.

## **Ideology of Repression**

On April 15, 1973, Qadhafi moved to cement power, unfettered by commitments to Cairo. He launched a systematic assault on the Libyan bureaucracy and intelligentsia. Speaking in Zuwarah, he delivered what became known as his "Five-Point Address," in which he declared:

- suspension of all existing laws and implementation of Shari'a (Islamic law)
- purging the country of the politically sick

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> George Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1993), p. 181.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Leslie Simons, *Libya: The Struggle for Survival* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 192-3.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Sicker, *The Making of a Pariah State* (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. 52.

- creation of a people’s militia to protect the revolution
- administrative revolution; and
- cultural revolution<sup>9</sup>

The speech was replete with religious symbolism. Delivered on the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday, the five points paralleled the five pillars of Islam. The Zuwarah address marked the start of Qadhafi’s absolute rule. He canceled school summer vacation and dispatched Benghazi University law students and clerics from Al-Azhar University in Cairo to indoctrinate primary and secondary students in his political vision. I was an eighth grade student at the time and forced to attend the summer “cultural school.” We were indoctrinated with revolutionary rhetoric and religious teachings.

Qadhafi’s speeches reflected his ruthlessness. He warned anyone who tried to organize politically that they would face repression. “I could at any moment send them to the People’s Court ... and the People’s Court will issue a sentence of death based on this law, because execution is the fate of anyone who forms a political party,” Qadhafi said during a speech in Tripoli on November 9, 1974.<sup>10</sup> He backed his threats with action. There were public hangings and mutilations of political opponents.

His megalomania was unchecked. He claimed that his rule was a “third international theory,” an alternative to both communism and democracy. In practice, his theory devastated civil society and destroyed both separation of powers and constitutionalism. He consolidated his governing philosophy into *The Green Book*.<sup>11</sup>

*The Green Book* consisted of three parts: “The Solution to Democratic Problems,” published in 1975; “The Solution to the Economic Problem,” in 1977; and “Offering Solutions to Complex Social Problems,” in 1981. Enacting the *Green Book* eviscerated every aspect of society. He used the second part to justify the confiscation of private businesses, nationalize private property, and cap the income of Libyan families.<sup>12</sup> Libyan society, once tolerant, grew less so. The third part undercut the position of women, which it labeled the “feebler sex,”<sup>13</sup> and berated black Africans, whom it labeled a lazy race liable to multiply without limit.<sup>14</sup>

In January 1976, the first General People’s Congress of the Arab Socialist Union convened in Tripoli.<sup>15</sup> On March 2, 1977, the Congress re-convened with Fidel Castro as the guest of honor.<sup>16</sup> At the Congress, Qadhafi declared Libya to be a “state of the masses” (*al-Jamahiriyya*) in which he derived power from neighborhood committees. While he claimed that such a system enabled popular representation, in actuality, it allowed Qadhafi to reach deeper

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<sup>9</sup> Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 179-80.

<sup>10</sup> [Al-Inqad](#), special issue on human rights in Libya, no. 37, 1993. Law 71 (1972) banned political parties.

<sup>11</sup> While several editions exist, all references to the English edition, unless otherwise noted are to Muammar al-Qadhafi [*sic*], *The Green Book* (Tripoli, Libya: Public Establishment for Publishing, Advertising, and Distribution, 1981[?]). [The Green Book](#) can be accessed in Arabic on the official site of the Revolutionary Committees Movement.

<sup>12</sup> *The Green Book*, pp. 43-69.

<sup>13</sup> “Al-Mar’a (The Woman),” *ibid.*, pp. 92-106.

<sup>14</sup> “Al-Sud (The Blacks),” *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>15</sup> Simons, *Libya: The Struggle for Survival*, p. 195.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Libya: A Modern History*, p. 191.

into society in order to transform an authoritarian system into a totalitarian one. The terror began almost immediately. Shortly after Castro left Libya, Qadhafi authorized the execution of twenty-two officers who had participated in a 1975 attempted coup, in addition to the execution of several civilians.<sup>17</sup>

Implementation of the *Jamahiriyya* system forced dependence upon the state. While Qadhafi retained ultimate political and budgetary authority, he created a hierarchy of organizations to enforce his will. At the national level, he established a Permanent General Secretariat—run by his cousins Zanati Zanati and Ahmed Ibrahim—to oversee the General People’s Committee, a General Secretariat, and the General People’s Congress.

The various institutions are cogs in a bureaucracy that goes nowhere. The General People’s Congress convenes annually, appoints the General People’s Committee, and adopts resolutions of the Basic People’s Congresses but has neither independent budgetary authority nor oversight of the armed forces. Its irrelevance to key policy decisions was demonstrated in 1980 when Libya went to war with Chad without a single General People’s Congress discussion. More recently, the General People’s Congress did not discuss the government’s decision to surrender Libyan suspects in the Lockerbie bombing for trial in Scotland nor to pay compensation to the victims’ families.

Some 453 Basic People’s Congresses meet quarterly to discuss an agenda pre-determined by Qadhafi.<sup>18</sup> Each Basic People’s Congress elects a secretariat and a collection of People’s Committees, which are diverse in function, focusing upon issues such as public works and health. All votes are cast in open ballots, allowing the state to punish dissent.

Overseeing the various secretariats is the General People’s Committee, which, in effect, acts as a council of ministries. Here, Qadhafi has allowed a non-family member to take control. He has appointed Shukri Ghanem, a graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, to head the General People’s Committee, putting a Western-educated face forward to interact with the outside world.

Revolutionary committees monitor the Basic People’s Congresses and People’s Committees and report to Qadhafi via a Permanent Revolutionary Committee. According to the U.S. State Department, 10 to 20 percent of Libyans work in surveillance for these committees,<sup>19</sup> a proportion of informants on par with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq or Kim Jong Il’s North Korea. Qadhafi has embedded revolutionary committees throughout government, in factories, and in the education sector.

There are no judicial checks and balances. The judiciary is ill-defined, allowing regime elites to use multiple security forces to harass ordinary Libyan citizens. Revolutionary committees run prisons with little or no documentation of the inmate population or of such basic data as crime and sentence. Revolutionary committees dispense justice, targeting, in particular, participants of the Basic Peoples’ Congresses who voice opposition to the state’s agenda. Dissent is illegal under Law 75 of 1973, which denies Libyans freedom of expression. Participants have disappeared after Congress discussions. On October 19, 2002, security forces arrested my

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<sup>17</sup> Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>18</sup> Kikhia, *Libya’s Qaddafi, The Politics of Contradiction*, p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> “[Libya](#),” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, Feb. 28, 2005).

brother, Fathi Eljahmi, after he spoke out for political and democratic reforms at the local Basic People's Congress.

Qadhafi's death squads terrorize the population. Since 1980, when he ordered the liquidation of dissidents—"stray dogs"—at home and abroad, Libyan agents have killed political dissidents, both real and perceived. In December 1993, Libyan agents kidnapped former Libyan foreign minister and dissident Mansur Kikhia, one month before he was to receive U.S. citizenship.<sup>20</sup> Abdel Salam Jalloud, Qadhafi's former second-in-command, justified the assassination of dissidents, saying, "Many people who fled abroad took with them goods belonging to the Libyan people ... Now they are putting their illicit gains at the disposal of the opposition led by Sadat, world imperialism, and Israel."<sup>21</sup> Libyan television broadcast hangings and mutilations.

Libyans in the United States have not been immune to Qadhafi's rampage. In 1980, while the Libyan government still maintained an embassy in Washington, a Libyan agent attempted to assassinate dissident Faisal Zagallai, a doctoral student at the University of Colorado, Boulder. The bullets left Zagallai partially blinded.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the most dangerous tool of judicial oppression is the Law of Collective Punishment, passed in 1997, which allows the state to sanction entire families, towns, or districts for the wrongdoing of individuals.<sup>23</sup> There are no checks and balances. Qadhafi rules supreme. His nationalization of private property has allowed him to exert complete control over the economy and also keep foreign investors in check. Fulfillment of the needs of all Libyan citizens depends upon their absolute obedience.<sup>24</sup>

## Radicalizing Religious Expression

Qadhafi has sought to dominate not only Libya's political society but also its religious life. Before Qadhafi seized power, most Libyans—especially those in the eastern (Cyrenaica) and southeastern parts of the country—followed Sanusi teachings. Sayyid Mohammad bin Ali al-Sanusi (1787 - 1859), who founded the Sanusi order in 1837, was an Islamic reformer who believed in austerity, simplicity, and the free interpretation of the Shari'a law. He criticized the rigid interpretation of the Qu'ran by strict Sunni schools in Egypt and what is now Saudi Arabia.<sup>25</sup>

In the early 1970s, Qadhafi began to saturate the Libyan media with condemnation of spirituality and introduced Salafist rhetoric encouraging obedience to the ruler. Street posters created by his regime carried slogans such as "Obey those in authority" and "Every shepherd has his own flock." Libyan television showed security officers interrogating former Sufis and then leading them to repent from practicing *dikhr* (meditation). He sought to suppress the

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<sup>20</sup> "[Overview of State-Sponsored Terrorism](#)," *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Tremlett, *Gadaffi: The Desert Mystic*, p. 243.

<sup>22</sup> *The New York Times*, Aug. 20, 1981.

<sup>23</sup> "State-[Civil Society Relations: Libya](#)," Program on Governance in the Arab Region, U.N. Arab Development Program, accessed Aug. 1, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> *The Green Book*, p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya, State Formation, Colonization, and Resistance, 1830-1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 88.

independence of Sanusi preachers, razing the Sanusi mosque and university and desecrating the graves of the Sanusi family.<sup>26</sup>

Qadhafi has consistently used the cloak of religion to propagate his politics. In 1970, he founded the Islamic Call Society (Jam`iyat ad-Da`wa al-Islamiya) whose charter calls for proselytizing in Africa and elsewhere. In the late 1970s, the Jam`iyat ad-Da`wa al-Islamiya was placed under the supervision of the Libyan External Security Organization, where its role was expanded to include subversion and propaganda.<sup>27</sup>

Qadhafi has adopted a guise of religiosity to affirm his rule and intimidate opponents, whom he calls *zanadiqa* (heretics). With messianic megalomania, he has adopted the identity of various Islamic prophets. In his first communiqué on coming to power in 1969, he compared himself to Abraham by declaring, “With a single blow from your heroic army, the idols have fallen and false gods have been destroyed.”<sup>28</sup> Later, he wrapped himself in the symbolism of Jesus and Muhammad.<sup>29</sup>

In 1976, Mohammad Hassan, Qadhafi’s court musician, penned a song in which he called Qadhafi “Messenger of the Arabian Desert,” drawing a parallel between the Libyan dictator and the Prophet Muhammad. In a 1979 interview with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, Qadhafi called his *Green Book* “the new gospel,”<sup>30</sup> again implying a parallel between himself and Muhammad, whom Muslims believe received the Qur’an from God through the angel Gabriel.

In 1992, the Libyan regime issued a commemorative stamp on the anniversary of its takeover (“the Al-Fateh revolution”) which depicts Qadhafi on a white horse that appears to be leaping into the sky, an illusion to Al-Buraq, the white winged beast that Muhammad mounted on his overnight journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

Such religious egoism has not dissipated with time or with Libya’s recent rapprochement with the West. In April 2005, Revolutionary Guard commander Hasan al-Kabir al-Qadhafi reiterated the same theme when he said there existed a special relationship between the leader and God and called Qadhafi a *murabit* (a living saint).<sup>31</sup> During a July 2005 meeting, the General Union for Producers, in effect, a state-controlled trade union, told Qadhafi, “We value and are proud of your imamship for millions of Muslims from East to West, so that the banner of Islam can be raised so high to fulfill the will of Allah.”<sup>32</sup>

Qadhafi has used his rapprochement with western Europe and the United States to portray himself as anti-Islamist, but the reality is more complex. While Islamist groups have targeted Qadhafi, his consistent flirtation with Islamism suggests that he may not be adverse to a tactical alignment, perhaps by seeking to brand his own form of Islamism. General Charles Wald, deputy commander of the U.S. European Command, who suggests that Tripoli shares Washington’s concerns about radical Islamism,<sup>33</sup> is naïve. Washington once trumpeted Saddam

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<sup>26</sup> “[Sanussi Dynasty](#) of Libya,” official website of the Gilanis, accessed Sept. 22, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Lillian Craig Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi’s Revolution and the Modern State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> “[Al-Bayan al-Awal](#),” first communiqué of the revolution, accessed Sept. 25, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> “The [Brother Leader Speaks](#) at the Opening Session of the General People’s Congress on Tuesday, March 2, 2005,” accessed Sept. 25, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi’s Revolution and the Modern State*, p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> “The Regime Threatens to Revert to Past Oppressive Tactics,” [Akhbar Libya](#) (London), accessed Sept. 25, 2005.

<sup>32</sup> “The Brother [Leader of the Revolution receives delegations](#) from the Congresses of the Professional, Syndicates, Producers and Services in the Great Jamahiriyya,” Revolutionary Committees Movement website, accessed Sept. 13, 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Associated Press, Apr. 25, 2005.

Hussein as an anti-Islamist, but following his 1991 defeat in Operation Desert Storm, the Iraqi leader used religion as a crutch.

## **Has Rapprochement Worked?**

Foreign policy realists can argue that sometimes the price of compromise is worth it. In the case of Libya, though, it is not. In the latter years of the Clinton administration, Qadhafi quietly reached out to U.S. interlocutors. Engagement was cost-free for the Libyan leader. There is no evidence that he was sincere. At the time, he neither curbed his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction nor his support for terrorism. In 2000, his self-described ransom payments to Abu Sayyaf terrorists in the Philippines, for example, allowed the group to expand in both numbers and capability.<sup>34</sup>

President Bush's willingness to use force against Saddam Hussein motivated Qadhafi to change his position. He saw Washington defy the will of many European allies and saw the failure of the Iraqi president's strategy of stalling. Qadhafi offered to forfeit his weapons of mass destruction program. His concession was tactical, however, a shrewd calculation of the weak ingratiating itself to the strong. While Qadhafi forfeited his program and some equipment, the knowledge remains and, with the lifting of United Nations and European Union sanctions, the ability to upgrade and reconstitute the program.

Washington's embrace of Tripoli has been premature. Domestic policy is a window into the character of rulers. In Qadhafi's case, it shows he has not changed his behavior or perspective. Rather than reform, he has sought only the image of reform. He abolished the Exceptional Court, for example, in order to demonstrate a new commitment to the rule of law, but rather than end prosecution of political crimes, he simply shifted jurisdiction for them to criminal courts. Despite rhetoric meant to attract foreign investment, there has been no economic liberalization.

Treatment of minorities can be a barometer of sincerity. Here, too, Qadhafi fails. According to Raphael Luzon, chairman of the Libyan Jewish community in Great Britain and deputy president of the World International Federation of the Jews of Libya, "Qadhafi ordered the destruction of all Jewish cemeteries in Benghazi and Tripoli. Despite Qadhafi's recent declarations that Libyan Jews are welcome to come back and visit, Libyan authorities have refused to grant me permission to visit Libya three times."<sup>35</sup>

The case of my brother is also instructive. On March 12, 2004, Bush stood in the East Room of the White House and declared:

We stand with courageous reformers. Earlier today, the Libyan government released Fathi Eljahmi. He's a local government official who was imprisoned in 2002 for advocating free speech and democracy. It's an encouraging step toward reform in Libya. You probably have heard, Libya is beginning to change her attitude about a lot of things.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> "[Abu Sayyaf History](#)," *Combating Terrorism in the Philippines*, U.S. Pacific Command, Mar. 5, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Telephone interview with Raphael Luzon, Sept. 24, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> News release, office of the press secretary, The White House, [Mar. 12, 2004](#).

Within two weeks, though, the regime had arrested him again. During his brief furlough, Eljahmi had granted interviews on a number of Arabic-language satellite stations calling for more rights.<sup>37</sup> It was one thing to promise reform but quite another to tolerate it. With no White House reaction to Eljahmi's re-arrest, Qadhafi extended his crackdown. In 2004, Libyan security arrested brothers Fawzi and Naji Eissawi. Fawzi's crime was sending this author e-mails. He also imprisoned dissident Abdul Razzaq al-Mansouri.<sup>38</sup> Washington's continued silence in the face of Qadhafi's crackdown may have emboldened the Libyan leader. In June 2005, regime elements murdered dissident Daif al-Ghazal.<sup>39</sup> Today, hundreds of new political prisoners occupy Libyan jail cells. But Washington has not withdrawn any of its carrots to protest Qadhafi's insincerity nor insisted that the Libyan leader's gestures be more than fleeting.

There has been some positive action by U.S. officials. Pressure by Senator Joseph Biden (Democrat, Del.) was largely responsible for the initial release of Fathi Eljahmi. When visiting the People's Congress, Biden demanded democracy and human rights for Libyans and also held the Libyan regime responsible for the downing of Pan Am 103.<sup>40</sup> Prior to the end of his tenure, Secretary of State Colin Powell drew much abuse from the official Libyan media when he said, "We have no illusions about Colonel Qadhafi or the nature of his regime."<sup>41</sup> The next day, the Libyan news agency JANA quoted foreign minister Abdel Rahman Shalqam as saying that Libya "will begin filing a law suit against him [Colin Powell] because his statement implies insult and libel against all Libyans."<sup>42</sup> *Az-Zahf al-Akhdar* also published an article that contained personal and racial insults about Powell. The article also referred to President Bush as "emperor" and U.S. intelligence as "mafia."<sup>43</sup> In the Arab world, such bombast is a sure sign that the initial comments struck an official nerve.

Testifying before Congress, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns said, "We will express our deep concern over individual cases, such as the re-detention of political opposition leader Fathi Eljahmi."<sup>44</sup> Arab satellite television stations broadcast Burns's comments and boosted the morale of our family.

Nevertheless, such official statements are few and far between. Qadhafi appears only to be buying time, utilizing meetings with some U.S. politicians and Western politicians such as Canadian prime minister Paul Martin and British prime minister Tony Blair to bolster international legitimacy and deflate the morale of Libya's democratic underground. Every time Libyan television is able to broadcast photos of a prominent Western politician meeting with and implying endorsement of Qadhafi, it is a propaganda coup for the regime.

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<sup>37</sup> For example, interview on Al-Hurrah television, Mar. 16, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> ArabicNews.com, [May 25, 2005](#).

<sup>39</sup> "Libya: Watchdog Condemns Journalist's Killing," Reporters sans Frontières press release, Paris, June 7, 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph [Biden](#), address to the People's Congress of Libya, Tripoli, Mar. 3, 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Colin Powell, speech, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, D.C., [July 15, 2004](#).

<sup>42</sup> Libyan Jamahiriya Broadcasting Corporation, [July 17, 2004](#).

<sup>43</sup> *Az-Zahf al-Akhdar* (Tripoli), July 16, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> William J. [Burns](#), statement before the U.S. House Committee on International Relations, Mar. 16, 2005.

## **Building a Better Future for Libya**

Qadhafi may have pledged to abandon terrorism and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, but his assurances are fleeting. His evolution and political development suggest unrestrained megalomania.

With oil in excess of \$60 per barrel, U.S. forces bogged down in Iraq, and international sanctions lifted, the Libyan leader is no longer in a position of weakness vis-à-vis Washington and the West.

An understanding of his personality and history suggests Qadhafi to be impervious to change. Real security for both Libya and the United States will require democratic reform in Libya. There is no indication, however, that Qadhafi is willing to loosen his grip on all levers of power, regardless of his pursuit of rapprochement with the West.

Given Qadhafi's hold on society, reform will not be possible without outside pressure. Washington can play a supportive role in encouraging Libyan reform. First, it can deny Qadhafi legitimacy. Expansion of commercial ties absent pressure to democratize undercuts reform and is contradictory to the rhetoric of President George W. Bush.

The White House's failure to stand up for dissidents and democrats hurts the U.S. image, not only in Libya but throughout the Middle East. If Washington wants to win hearts and minds throughout the Arab world, it must adopt a more consistent approach to the abuse by dictators of their citizenry. There is no reason, for example, why the White House should condemn the murder of Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir<sup>45</sup> but remain silent after the assassination of Libyan journalist Daif al-Ghazal. If the Bush administration is serious about democracy, it should demand that Qadhafi abolish laws preventing the exercise of basic political rights and tie rapprochement to the release of political prisoners. In the interim, there should be no diplomatic visits unless the Qadhafi regime allows independent organizations such as Physicians for Human Rights and the Red Cross to visit the hundreds of political prisoners in Libyan custody.

Until there is democratic change, the State Department should be wary of cultural and educational exchanges. They should not be fooled by Qadhafi's request to send Libyan students to study at U.S. universities. The Libyan regime will embed regime apparatchiks and intelligence officers. At a minimum, they will seek to intimidate Libyan Americans. They may also seek to assist radical groups within the United States.

Washington has blundered with its rapprochement to Libya. Arab press throughout the Middle East has suggested that the rapprochement with Libya is proof of U.S. insincerity about democracy. During an interview with Al-Jazeera television, Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam said that the U.S. government has exempted Libya from the democratization of the Middle East by accepting Qadhafi's *Jamahiriyya* democracy: "Initially the United States had the idea of exporting the Western model of representative democracy to the Arab world. More recently, the United States has changed its approach, supporting local versions of democracy,"<sup>46</sup> he said. Such inconsistency fuels hatred and harms the long-term interests of both Libya and America.

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<sup>45</sup> Scott McClellan, White House spokesman, Air Force One, [June 6, 2005](#).

<sup>46</sup> Al-Jazeera television, Apr. 27, 2005.