



COMMENTARY

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The Colonel's Dramatic End

Hayat Alvi

US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island

For nearly eight months, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi had been ahead of the game and eluded capture, while directing his loyalists in Libya to fight against the people he referred to as 'rats and cockroaches.' His brutality and disconnect from the masses notwithstanding, he did remain in the frontlines with his combat forces until the end. He also stayed true to his words, when he said he would go alley to alley and door to door and eliminate, as he put it, 'drugged children and Al Qaeda.' Indeed, he commanded his troops and mercenaries to flush out the perceived trouble-makers, regardless of guilt or innocence. He also stayed true to his word that he would never leave Libya and would die there; and die he did, a most violent death. What an ignominious end for the 'Brother Leader.'

Many years ago in the United States, I recall meeting a Libyan for the first time. He described to me how dark, life was under Qaddafi's rule. This person told me that he escaped Libya for his life and that there were countless Libyans who were imprisoned, exiled, or killed for being suspected of disloyalty to the Colonel.

However, Qaddafi not only ruled his own people with a brutal iron fist, but throughout the years he sponsored and financed some of the most notoriously violent groups and individuals in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the Philippines, and in Europe, the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Libya's highly lucrative oil revenues helped finance Qaddafi's whims. Consider this 2009 article about him in the *Telegraph*:

Middle East Institute @ New Delhi, www.mei.org.in

Idi Amin, the Ugandan despot who believed in nothing save self-enrichment and murder, was a particular favourite. When Amin faced a war which eventually overthrew him in 1979, Colonel Gaddafi tried to save his friend by sending Libyan troops to fight in Uganda.

A host of murderous leaders were sponsored by Colonel Gaddafi, notably Charles Taylor, the Liberian despot, and Foday Sankoh, the psychotic commander of the rebels who laid waste to Sierra Leone.

Colonel Gaddafi also served as paymaster and arms dealer to the IRA, while helping out a host of extremists on the fringe of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. All this made him a crucial enemy of the West, causing President Ronald Reagan to label him a 'mad dog' and order American bombers to strike Tripoli in 1986. Two years later, Pan Am flight 103 was destroyed above Lockerbie.

Colonel Qaddafi overthrew Libya's King Idris in 1969, and fancied himself as the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist hero/warrior, and likened himself to Libya's legendary guerrilla fighter Omar Mukhtar, who fought against Italian colonial rule. However, Colonel Qaddafi's rule proved to be less far inspiring to his own people. According to the *Economist* magazine:

In his Libya, dissent was punishable by death. A private press was forbidden, and political parties banned. Several dozen deaths a year of political opponents were attributed to his secret police, acting on tip-offs from the surveillance committees to which around 10 percent of Libyans belonged. In Abu Salim prison, on one night in 1996, 1,200 political prisoners died. If his enemies fled abroad, his hired assassins found these 'scum' and killed them. The colonel's writ, as recorded in his '*Green Book*' of rambling political philosophy, replaced the rule of law.

Qaddafi was also often at odds with his fellow Arab leaders in the Middle East, and then he shifted his priorities—and some would say even his identity—towards Africa. Qaddafi supported the African Union, and numerous countries on the continent became his patrons nearly overnight, once again including some very unsavoury characters like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. The *Daily News Zimbabwe* reports, 'Zimbabwe is named as one of the destinations for Gaddafi's money, estimated at US\$150 billion in both listed and non-listed entities around the world. Apart from banking assets, the late dictator had interests in farming, tourism and mining, and his son Saif al-Islam was in the country last year to scout for more deals.'

The world has witnessed Qaddafi as an ultra-eccentric, enigmatic dictator with a god complex. His narcissism and vanity glared manifestly with his flamboyant clothing, plastic surgery, and hair dyes. At the same time, he depicted himself as 'one of the people,' often seen running a tractor in the fields, or pitching a tent, in order to illustrate his oneness with the common people,

and as such, he tried to drive home the point that he never forgot his humble beginnings, born in a Bedouin tent in Sirte among farmers and desert nomads.

In reality, Qaddafi surrounded himself with opulence and women, including a Ukrainian nurse and a contingent of female bodyguards, who apparently did not serve him well in the end. And then there is the supposedly obsessive attraction Qaddafi had to Condoleezza Rice, which goes beyond the peculiar.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which toppled Saddam Hussein and ultimately led to his execution by hanging, was a major turning point for Qaddafi. Saddam Hussein's fate was the impetus for Qaddafi's decision to give up his nuclear/WMD program, and reconcile with the West. The moment he flashed Libya's oil money as bait, the West salivated and rushed to befriend the former 'godfather of terrorism.' From Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Silvio Berlusconi, and Nikolas Sarkozy, to Hillary Clinton and President Obama, all are caught on camera shaking hands with Colonel Qaddafi or his family members. In addition, documents found following battles in Tripoli reveal that Qaddafi was a willing partner in the 'war on terror,' and Libya participated in the renditions of detainees. This has been a source of embarrassment for the UK in particular, as Tony Blair allegedly supported such arrangements with the Qaddafi regime.

It is terribly ironic that the man who showed no mercy to his victims, in the end and in his last breath pleaded for mercy for his own life. Perhaps, in the judgment of many Libyans, it is not just ironic, but also incredibly befitting.

Dr. Hayat Alvi is an Associate Professor at the US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island and the views expressed are her own. Email: hayat@hayatalvi.com.

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