

FOREIGN POLICY OF LIBYA DURING THE RULE OF MUAMMAR KADDAFI

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Abstract: This article examines the foreign policy of Libya during the era of Muammar Gaddafi, focusing on his relations with Arab-Africa, the United States, and Western countries. M. Gaddafi promoted the idea of Pan-Arabism in his foreign policy towards Arab states and called for the unification of Arab and African countries. Relations with the West and the United States were complex, prominently reflected in diplomatic conflicts and disputes.

Keywords: Pan-Arab idea, Federation of Arab Republics (FAR), Tripoli Charter, Cairo Declaration, Anwar Sadat, CENSAD, Lockerbie case.

Muammar Gaddafi's foreign policy was highly diverse and characterized by ambition and determination. Libya became one of the most active founding members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Gaddafi regarded oil as a strategic tool to exert pressure on Western countries and Israel. As a result, within the OPEC framework, Libya consistently advocated for increasing oil prices, imposing embargoes, and regulating production levels. Consequently, Libya's domestic oil output was halved between 1970 and 1974. However, there was no reason for despair, as the country's oil revenues quadrupled during the same period. The lowest level of oil production was recorded in 1975, after which it stabilized at approximately 2 million barrels per day and remained at that level until the onset of the global crisis in the 1980s.

Despite the failure of the Federation of Arab Republics (FAR), Gaddafi remained resolute and sought to initiate negotiations for a unification with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. This plan had potential for success: Egypt had a population of approximately 34 million, while Libya had fewer than 2 million people, but Libya's revenue was fourteen times greater. In 1973, Gaddafi even organized a "sacred march" to Cairo, involving around 30,000 Libyans, aimed at demonstrating Libya's commitment to the proposed union. Gaddafi even offered Sadat the position of joint head of state. While Sadat was still contemplating the offer, subsequent developments unfolded that determined the outcome.

One of the underlying motives behind Gaddafi's appeal to pan-Arab movements was his deep animosity toward Israel. His primary objective in seeking an alliance with Egypt was to oppose and, if possible, eliminate the newly established Jewish state. Gaddafi secretly transferred elements of his air force to Egypt, which participated in the Yom Kippur War as part of the Egyptian military. Ironically, it was this very war that delivered the final blow to the Libyan-Egyptian alliance. Gaddafi was outraged when his supposed partners, Egypt and Syria, entered the war with Israel without consulting him. The war ended in failure for them.[1 P-87.]

Colonel Gaddafi could not tolerate this and consequently severed relations with Egypt. Tensions between the two countries only escalated from there. Sadat began initiating a peace process with Israel, which Gaddafi vehemently opposed. In 1977, a short-lived war broke out between Egypt and Libya, sparked by increasing mistrust and Egypt's accusations that Libya was sponsoring subversive activities aimed at toppling the Egyptian government. Algeria

intervened in time to mediate the conflict. As a result of this conflict, thousands of Egyptian workers employed in Libya's oil, agriculture, and trade sectors left the country, significantly destabilizing the Libyan economy.

Nonetheless, Gaddafi remained unwavering. In 1977, on the eve of Egypt's peace agreement with Israel (signed in 1978), he proposed a new union involving Libya, Syria, Algeria, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen), and the Palestine Liberation Organization. This association was explicitly opposed to Sadat's negotiations with Israel. Gaddafi even called for a boycott of Egypt.[2 P-25.]

Gaddafi's attempt to unify with his western neighbor Tunisia also failed and eventually resulted in the severance of diplomatic relations in the early 1980s.

Following these setbacks with Tunisia and Egypt, Gaddafi once again tried to entice Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. In September 1980, the two leaders attempted to form a new union. According to the agreement, Libya committed to taking over Syria's \$1 billion debt to the Soviet Union, which had been accumulated primarily for arms purchases. However, the alliance with Syria was not the most straightforward path to Arab unity.

The reason was that in September 1980, a war broke out between Iran and Iraq. At Syria's behest, both Libya and Syria supported Iran, a stance unique in the Arab world. As a result, Libya's relations with Iraq and Saudi Arabia significantly deteriorated due to its cooperation with Syria.[1 P-31.]

Alongside his efforts to strengthen ties with Arab countries, Muammar Gaddafi also turned his attention toward other African nations.

In 1973, the Libyan army entered the Aouzou Strip in neighboring Chad and established a military base. At the time, Chad was experiencing a civil war between the northern and southern regions of the country. France, the former colonial power, supported the south, while Gaddafi backed the north. The Libyan base was intended to provide military assistance to the northern factions. Moreover, rumors had emerged that uranium and other valuable minerals had been discovered in the Aouzou Strip.

Later, in 1980, Gaddafi's forces, in coordination with the northern factions, captured Chad's capital, N'Djamena. As a result, a potential unification between Libya and Chad was nearly realized. However, due to fierce opposition from the international community—especially France—the unification had to be abandoned. Yielding to international pressure, Gaddafi withdrew between 10,000 and 15,000 troops from central Chad back to the Aouzou region.

In the early 1970s, Gaddafi also became involved in Sudan's internal affairs by supporting President Jaafar Muhammad Nimeiry in his fight against leftist opposition forces. However, disappointment awaited Gaddafi here as well. By the mid-1970s, Nimeiry accused the Libyan leader of attempting to overthrow the legitimate government in Sudan, which severely strained relations between the two countries.

Furthermore, Gaddafi provided financial and technical support to another highly controversial figure: Uganda's Islamic leader Idi Amin. Despite Amin's regime being notorious for its human rights violations, he was seen as a challenge to Israel's regional interests, which aligned with Gaddafi's anti-Israel stance. Thus, Gaddafi found it imperative to support him.[3 P-45.]

Soon after coming to power, Muammar Gaddafi committed Libya to the idea of Pan-Arabism, aiming to unite the country with its Arab neighbors. In 1969, Gaddafi met with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Sudanese Prime Minister Jaafar Nimeiry, resulting in the signing of the Tripoli Charter, which proposed the unification of the three states. On November 8, 1970, the Cairo Declaration was signed, establishing the Federation of Arab Republics (FAR),

comprising Egypt, Libya, and Sudan. That same year, Gaddafi proposed a union with Tunisia, but then-President Habib Bourguiba rejected the idea.

As Libya's leader from 1969, Muammar Gaddafi played a significant role in regional and global politics. His foreign policy was shaped by relationships with African, Arab, and Western nations and was characterized by his anti-imperialist, Pan-Africanist, and regional integrationist principles.[2 P-83.]

In the African context, Gaddafi actively pursued Pan-Africanist policies. He aimed to elevate the continent's global standing by supporting political, economic, and social integration. Gaddafi provided both financial and political assistance to promote fair resource distribution, economic independence, and regional unity in Africa. While some of these efforts sought to address Africa's complex political and economic challenges, in certain cases, they also intensified conflicts and divisions. Nevertheless, Gaddafi's Africa-oriented policies contributed to raising the continent's profile within the global political system.

In the Arab world, Gaddafi worked to foster solidarity and regional cooperation through his political and economic strategies. He focused on strengthening Arab nationalism, reinforcing regional unity, and promoting political dialogue among Arab nations. Particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, Gaddafi launched several initiatives aimed at fostering regional political integration. His interactions with Arab countries were often intertwined with internal political tensions, regional conflicts, and competing economic interests—reflecting the complex and multifaceted nature of Arab politics.[4 P-112.]

Muammar Gaddafi's relations with the United States and Western countries were complex and multifaceted, becoming one of the most contentious directions of his foreign policy. Gaddafi viewed the West's political, economic, and military interests in the region as interference. From the 1980s onward, especially under accusations related to terrorism and international sanctions, Gaddafi entered into sharp confrontations with the U.S. and its allies. His anti-imperialist policies and his approach aimed at defending regional and global strategic interests led to open disputes and clashes with Western powers. Additionally, the unconventional and asymmetric political methods promoted by Gaddafi were perceived as threats by the West, complicating diplomatic relations even further.

Gaddafi's foreign policy was shaped around the principles of regional integration and anti-imperialism. His approach to Africa, Arab nations, and the West was intricate and varied, reflecting different political, economic, and military contexts in each region. In Africa, he initiated efforts toward regional unity and resource management. In the Arab world, he sought to strengthen solidarity and cooperation. His relations with the West, however, were marked by rivalry, conflict, and diplomatic tension, illustrating Libya's complicated role in global politics. Gaddafi's policies were tightly linked to his regional and global strategic objectives and are considered an important part of international politics at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries.

During the Uganda–Tanzania war of 1978–1979, Muammar Gaddafi sent 2,500 Libyan troops to support Ugandan dictator Idi Amin. In December 1979, the United States included Libya in its list of state sponsors of terrorism. In the early 1980s, the U.S. accused the Libyan regime of interfering in the internal affairs of at least 45 countries.

In the 1980s, Gaddafi established training camps in Libya for rebel groups throughout West Africa, including the Tuaregs. In 1981, Somalia accused Gaddafi of supporting the Somali Democratic Salvation Front and the Somali National Movement, severing diplomatic ties with Libya as a result. On September 1, 1984, Gaddafi announced that he had sent troops and

weapons to Nicaragua to support the Sandinista government in its struggle against the U.S. In March 1986, Gaddafi hosted the World Center Congress for the Struggle Against Imperialism and Zionism. Among the attendees were members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Basque separatist group ETA, and the leader of the American radical group Nation of Islam, African-American Muslim Louis Farrakhan. This further increased the concern of Western governments.

Throughout the 1980s, Gaddafi regarded the IRA's activities as part of the struggle against British colonialism and actively supplied them with weapons. Libya consistently supported such national liberation movements and their members, including Palestinian liberation organizations, both materially and financially. Libya was also suspected of supporting the Japanese Red Army in East Asia.

Gaddafi held a staunchly anti-Israel stance. On March 2, 1970, he called on all 35 member states of the Organization of African Unity to cut ties with Israel. In October 1973, during the Third Arab-Israeli War (Yom Kippur War), Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar raised the price of oil by 17%, to \$3.65 per barrel. Three days later, in protest of U.S. support for Israel, Libya imposed an oil embargo on the United States. Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries followed with similar embargos against nations that supported Israel or contributed to its efforts.[5 P-134.]

In 1984, Libya was suspected of laying mines in the Red Sea, resulting in damage to 18 ships. On April 17 of the same year, shots were fired from the Libyan People's Bureau (embassy) in London toward Libyan protesters, killing British police officer Yvonne Fletcher and injuring 11 others. Consequently, on April 22, the United Kingdom severed diplomatic ties with Libya.

During this period, Libya moved toward closer ties with the Soviet Union. The main goal was to rely on the USSR in its struggle against the United States and Western countries, and secondly, to acquire nuclear weapons technology.

Despite improved relations, Gaddafi famously stated: "The relationship between the USSR and Libya is a love that will never end in marriage." Gaddafi consistently supported the idea of establishing an independent Palestinian state, and he called for unity and solidarity within the Arab and African worlds. His policy toward the U.S. and Western countries was marked by constant diplomatic conflict and disputes.[6 P-61.]

In conclusion, Libya's foreign policy during this period was extremely complex. The country emerged as a key player in the Middle East region. Thanks to its vast oil reserves, it drew the interest of the United States and Western powers. Through his foreign policy, Gaddafi aimed to demonstrate that Libya had its own path, asserting independence on the global stage. He maintained a firm position against the U.S. and Western states and consistently supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the region.

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